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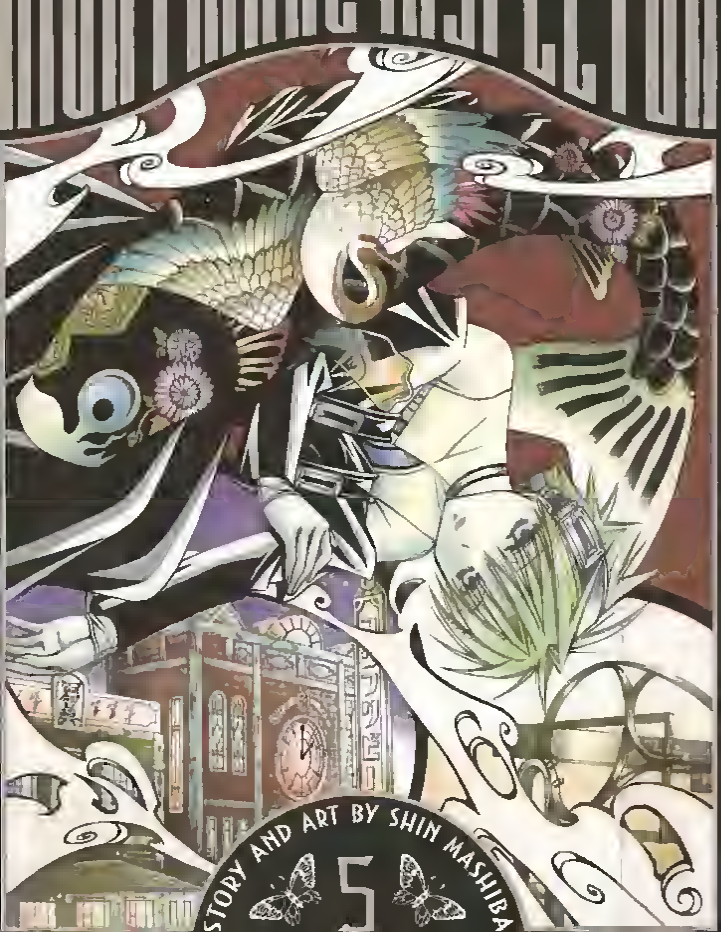
YUMEKUI KENBUN

NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR



YUMEKUI KENBUN

NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR

5

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DARKNESS

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STORY AND ART BY SHIN MASHIBA

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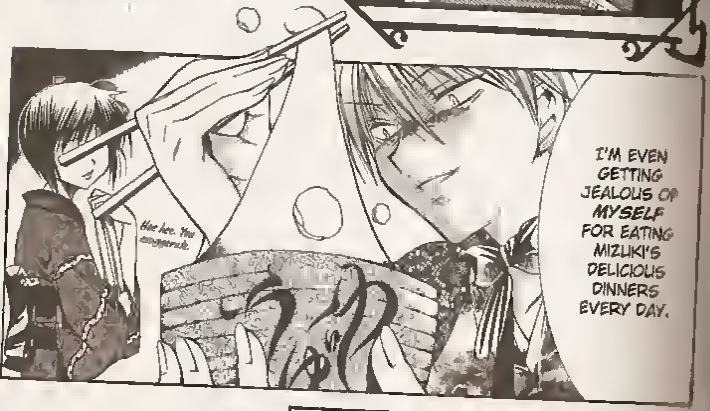
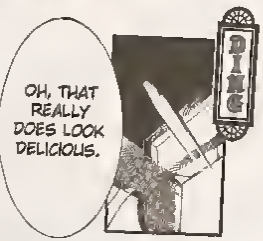
DARKNESS

The Twenty-Seventh Night: The Gap





YUMEKUI KENBUN

NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR

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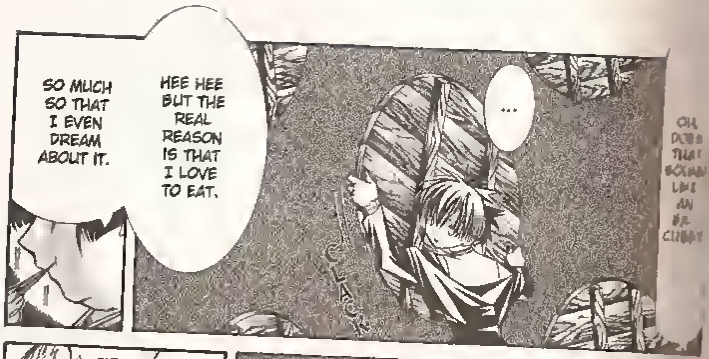
SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.
I SEE. THEN LET ME TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR DREAM
SHIN
TOOM

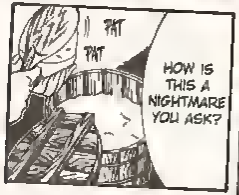
PLEASE COME IN. WOULD YOU CARE FOR SOME?
YES, LATER.
BUT FIRST, IS HE HIRUKO?

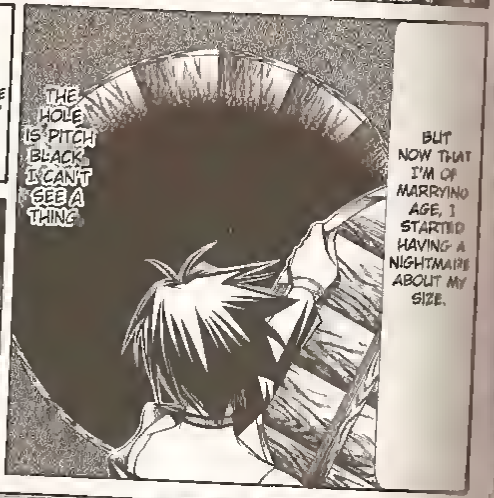
THAT'S GOOD.
?
YOU'RE QUITE SMALL.

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU.
I'M KAMEKO YASOJIMA. I'M HERE ABOUT A NIGHTMARE.

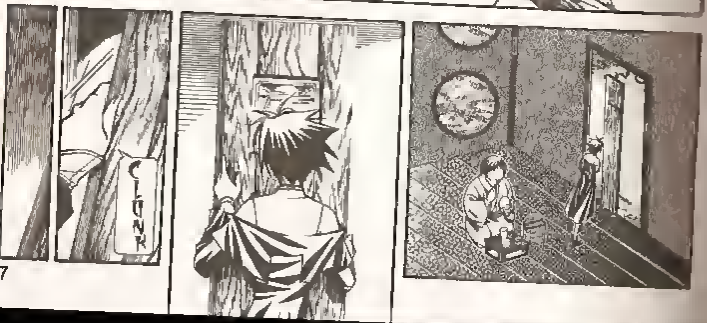
WHISPER
I'M TOO EMBARRASSED TO TALK ABOUT IT HERE...
WHISPER
WHAT KIND?
WHISPER
I HAVE THIS NIGHTMARE ABOUT MY FIGURE...
WHISPER

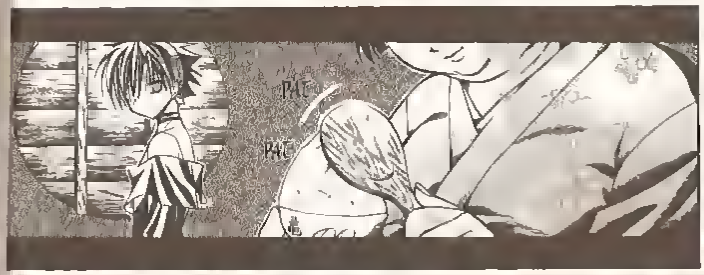

SO MUCH SO THAT I EVEN DREAM ABOUT IT.
HEE HEE BUT THE REAL REASON IS THAT I LOVE TO EAT.
...
OH, DOES THAT SOUND LIKE AN EX-CUSE?


PAT
PAT
HOW IS THIS A NIGHTMARE YOU ASK?


THE HOLE IS PITCH BLACK. I CAN'T SEE A THING.
BUT NOW THAT I'M OF MARRYING AGE, I STARTED HAVING A NIGHTMARE ABOUT MY SIZE.

IF YOU REMOVE THAT BOARD, YOU'LL SEE.


CLUNK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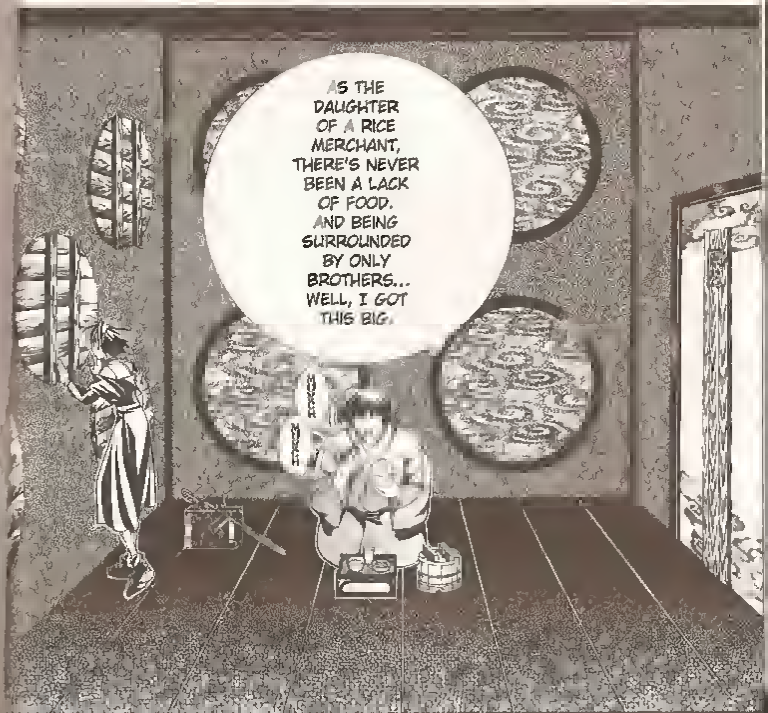
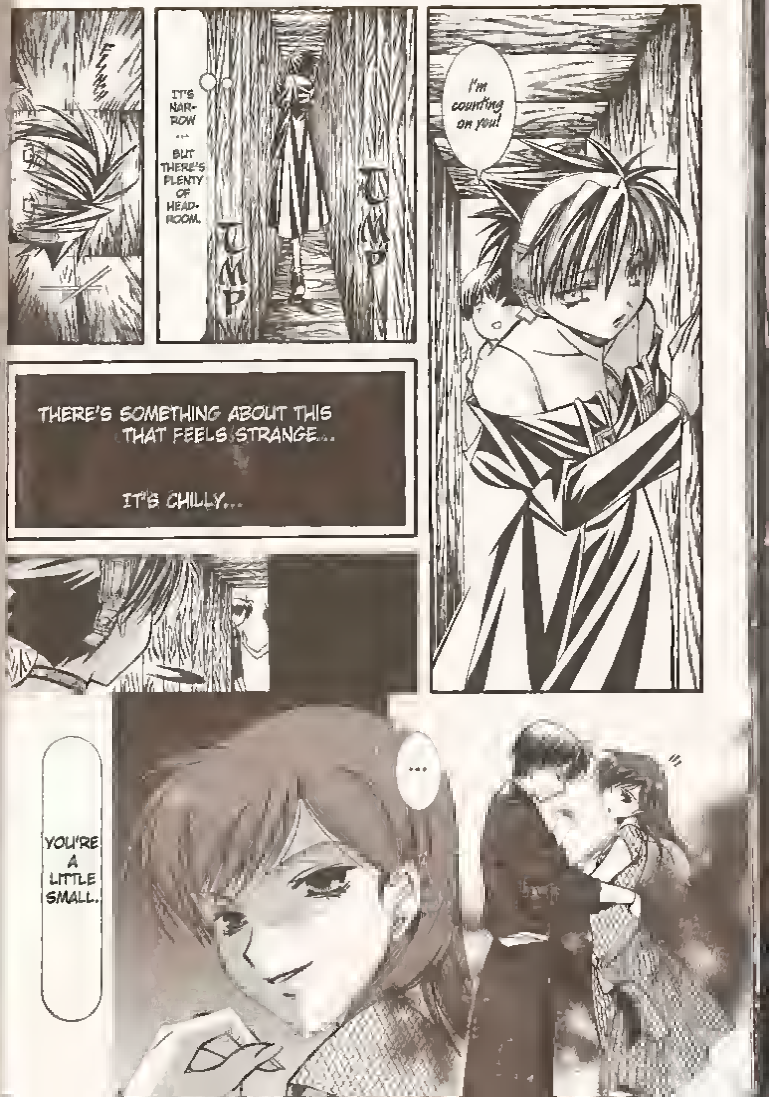
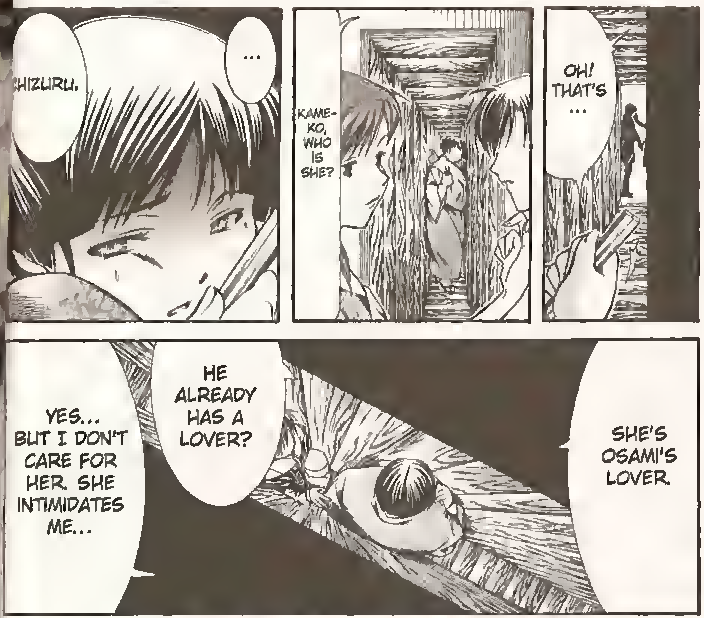

AS THE DAUGHTER OF A RICE MERCHANT, THERE'S NEVER BEEN A LACK OF FOOD. AND BEING SURROUNDED BY ONLY BROTHERS... WELL, I GOT THIS BIG.
MUNCH
MUNCH

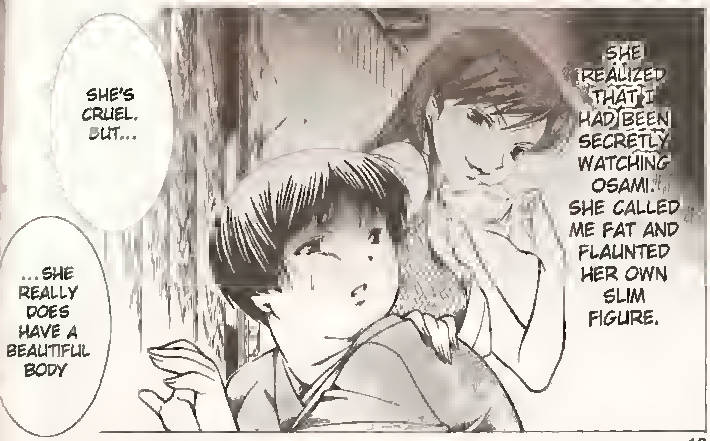
IF ONLY I COULD SLIM DOWN ENOUGH TO FIT THROUGH THIS GAP. THEN I COULD TALK TO HIM... BUT I CAN'T STOP EATING!
I'M SO SAD... THIS DREAM IS REALLY ABOUT MY ISSUES WITH WEIGHT, ISN'T IT?
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO TALK TO HIM! ...AT LEAST IN MY DREAMS.
BUT I CAN'T FIT THROUGH THIS GAP!
PLEASE! GO OVER THERE AND BRING HIM HERE!
PLEASE, HIRUKO!
YOU CAN FIT THROUGH THIS SPACE.
BUT THAT DOESN'T SOLVE THE REAL PROBLEM...
THAT'S THE MAN I'M IN LOVE WITH— OSAMI.
KAMEKO, WHO IS THAT?
HE'S SO PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK. I FELL IN LOVE WITH HIM INSTANTLY.
HE EXISTS IN REAL LIFE TOO.
Want some?
Later.
BUT I DON'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO APPROACH HIM. NOT LOOKING LIKE THIS...
I SEE SOMEONE.
SO...
I JUST WATCH HIM FROM AFAR WITHOUT SAYING A WORD.

?!
THUNK
WELCOME BACK
WHERE'S OSAMI?
SHOVE
IT HURTS! IT'S TOO TIGHT!
AAAAH! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I'M GOING TO VOMIT! I CAN'T STAND IT!
SHE FEELS IT TOO.
I CAN'T DESCRIBE IT...
IT FEELS CREEPY IN HERE...
STOP! I WON'T FIT!
NOOO!
HUH?


FLUMP
IT'S NARROW... BUT THERE'S PLENTY OF HEADROOM.
JUMP
JUMP
I'm counting on you!
THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THIS THAT FEELS STRANGE...
IT'S CHILLY...
YOU'RE A LITTLE SMALL..
...

CHIZURU.. YOUR BODY IS SO LONG AND SLENDER.
OSAMI HAS FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER BODY.
YOUR WAIST IS SO FIRM..
EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU IS WONDERFUL!
JUST GIVE UP!
I STILL LOVE HIM!
BUT ...!
THAT'S WHY I COULD NEVER SHOW MYSELF TO HIM.
SO HE'S THE KIND OF MAN WHO VALUES APPEARANCE OVER SUBSTANCE


...
CHIZURU.
KAME-KO, WHO IS SHE?
OH! THAT'S ...
SHE'S OSAMI'S LOVER.
HE ALREADY HAS A LOVER?
YES... BUT I DON'T CARE FOR HER. SHE INTIMIDATES ME...

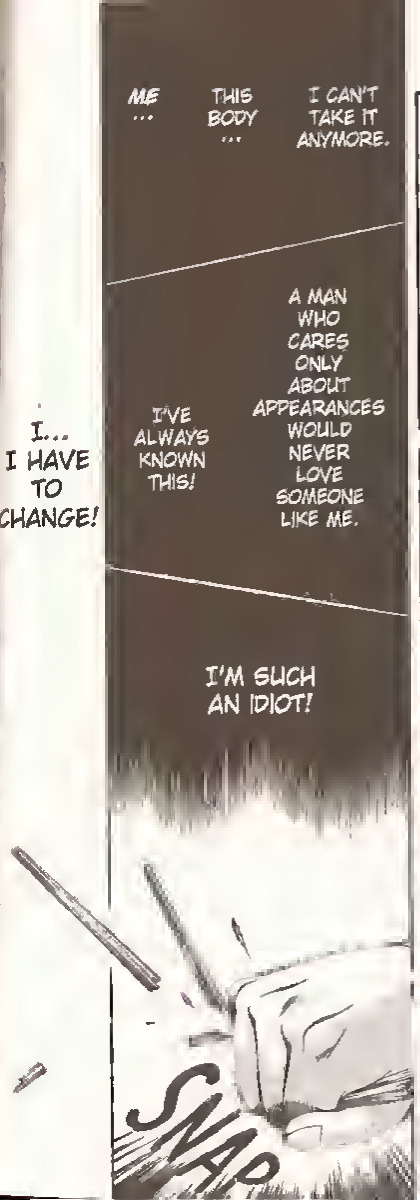

SHE REALIZED THAT I HAD BEEN SECRETLY WATCHING OSAMI. SHE CALLED ME FAT AND FLAUNTED HER OWN SLIM FIGURE.
SHE'S CRUEL. BUT...
...SHE REALLY DOES HAVE A BEAUTIFUL BODY

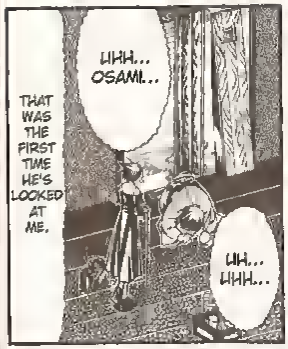
OH... OSAMI...
YOU'RE SO MEAN
IF YOU CAN'T DO THAT YOU'LL NEVER HAVE HIM! HIPPO! HIPPO!
SHE'S THE CLOSEST TO MY IDEAL WOMAN.
UGH.
AH...
AH.

IF THAT BOTHERS YOU...
THEN LOSE SOME WEIGHT!

DON'T YOU GET IT?! OSAMI WANTS SOMEONE WITH A BEAUTIFUL BODY LIKE MINE!
I'M HIS IDEAL! THERE'S NO WAY HE WOULD EVEN LOOK AT YOU!
CMP
ICK YOUR GROSS BODY IS SUCH AN EYE-SORE
HER BODY...!

MY MIND IS MADE UP.
SO I CAN FIT THROUGH THAT GAP.
I'M GONNA TO LOSE WEIGHT!!!
FOR ME, AND FOR OSAMI.
LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE MADE YOUR CHOICE.
ONE MORE THING, KAMEKO...

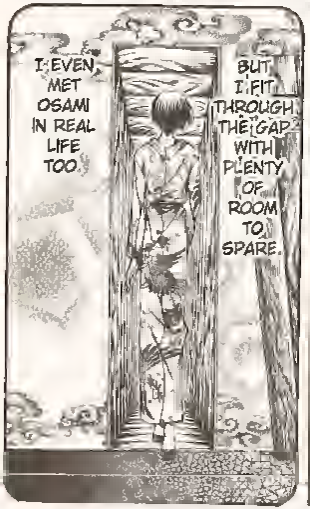

I... I HAVE TO CHANGE!
ME ... THIS BODY ... I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.
I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN THIS!
A MAN WHO CARES ONLY ABOUT APPEARANCES WOULD NEVER LOVE SOMEONE LIKE ME.
I'M SUCH AN IDIOT!
SNAP

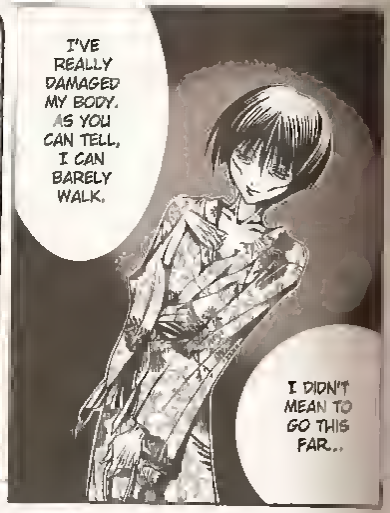

THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE'S LOOKED AT ME.
UHH... OSAMI...
UH... UHH...

YOU FAT COW.
THERE'S NO WAY HE WOULD EVEN LOOK AT YOU!
..NGH.

YES, AND UNTIL THEN I WILL KEEP HAVING THIS DREAM.
TIME TO WAKE UP.

BUT I'LL PROVE MY LOVE FOR HIM.
IT'S SAD THAT MY GOAL IS TO BECOME MY RIVAL
THE SIZE OF THE GAP...
...ITS CHILLING BODY PERFECTLY
I CAN'T CHANGE MY HEIGHT BUT I CAN WORK ON EVERYTHING ELSE.
I'LL DO ANYTHING!
WHEN YOU'RE SLIM ENOUGH TO PASS THROUGH THIS GAP, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TALK TO OSAMI. IN YOUR DREAM AND IN REALITY...


I EVEN MET OSAMI IN REAL LIFE TOO.
BUT I FIT THROUGH THE GAP WITH PLENTY OF ROOM TO SPARE.


I'VE REALLY DAMAGED MY BODY. AS YOU CAN TELL, I CAN BARELY WALK.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO GO THIS FAR...

I NOW HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

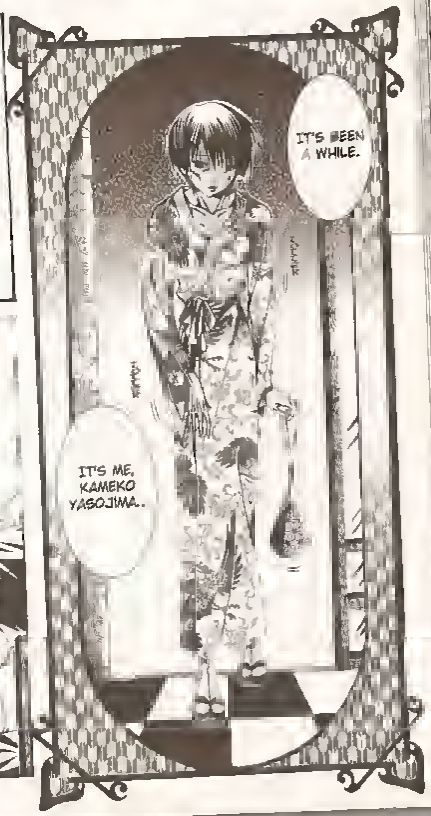
HE HAD ALREADY MARRIED CHIZURU.
I WAS TOO SKINNY TO BE HIS IDEAL... AND I WAS ALSO TOO LATE.
THAT'S GREAT.
SO HE FINALLY RECOGNIZED YOUR DEVOTION TO HIM?
NOT QUITE.

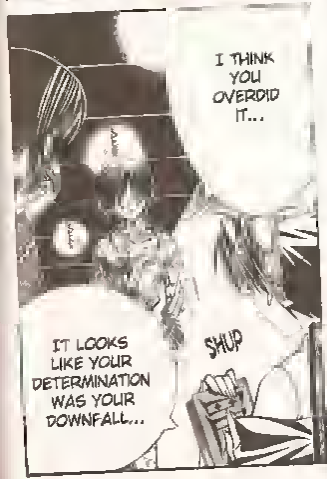
GASP

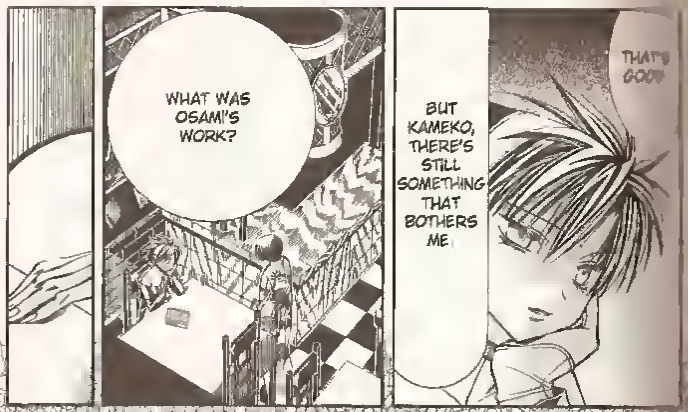
DING

A MONTH LATER

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU'RE SO...
IS IT REALLY YOU?!
KAMEKO?!


IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
IT'S ME, KAMEKO YAGOJIMA..


I THINK YOU OVERDID IT...
SHUP
IT LOOKS LIKE YOUR DETERMINATION WAS YOUR DOWNFALL...

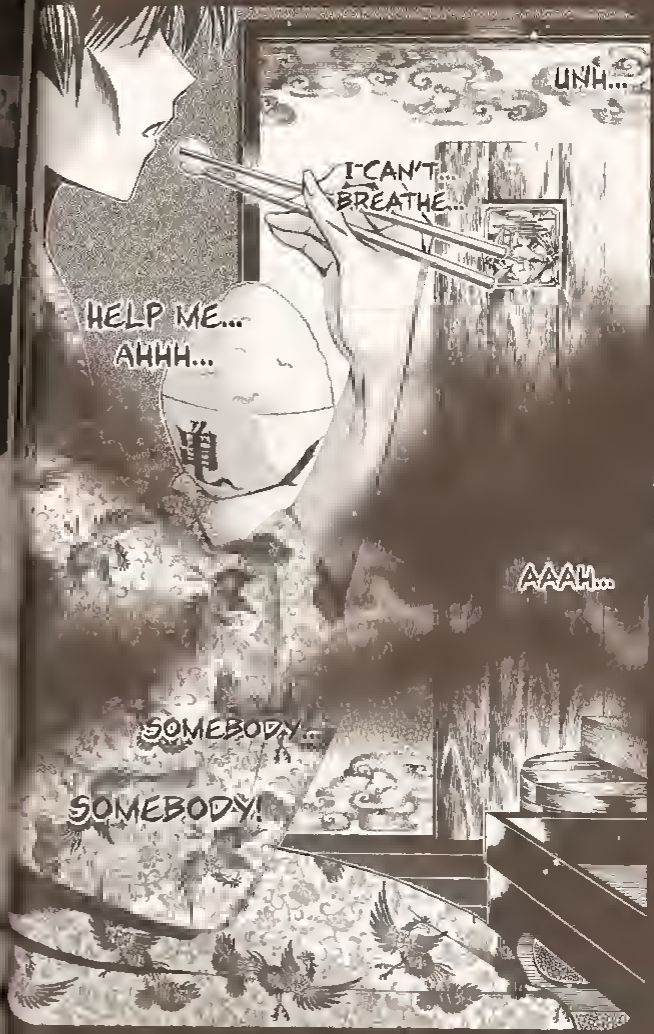


HE MAKES COFFINS.

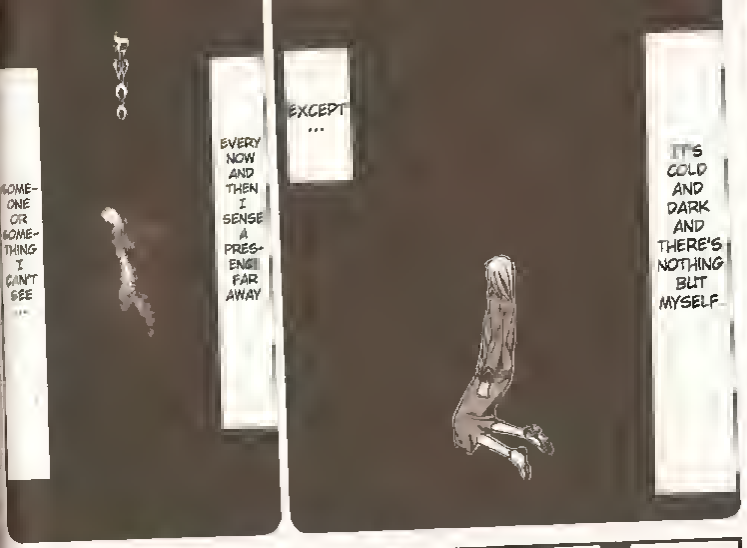
YOU WORKED SO HARD. WHAT A SHAME...
SQUEEZE
OH DEAR HE MUST HAVE REALLY LOVED HER BODY...
?
I DON'T EVEN DESPISE CHIZURU.
BUT FOR SOME REASON I DON'T FEEL SAD.
YES, IT REALLY IS A SHAME.
MY BODY AND HEART ARE WITHERED, BUT I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN FREED FROM MY IMPOSSIBLE DREAM
NOW I CAN FOCUS ON EATING AND REGAINING MY HEALTH
AND AS FURTHER PROOF THAT IT'S ALL OVER, THE GAP WAS FILLED IN

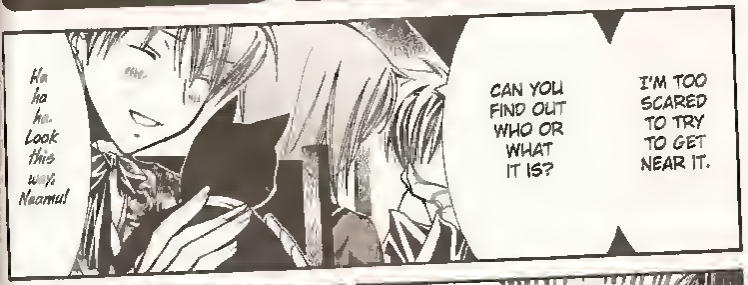
...IF HIS WORK WAS ONLY COMPLETE ONCE IT HAD A BODY INSIDE.
I WONDER...
THE OTHER DAY MY DREAM CHANGED.
YES.. BUT I THINK IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW.
SO, DO YOU HAVE A NIGHTMARE FOR ME TONIGHT?
IT'S ALL OVER NOW...
BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER...
I REALIZED THAT THE GAP AND THE COFFIN WERE THE SAME SIZE.
THE CARVED DETAILS WERE THE SAME TOO.
THE GAP THAT HAD BEEN FILLED NOW HAD A LID ON IT AGAIN
WHENEVER I USED TO WATCH HIM, IT WAS ALWAYS BY HIS SIDE
HE WOULDN'T PART WITH IT, NOT EVEN FOR ITS OWNER
HIS FAVORITE COFFIN WAS A CASKET HE MADE FOR A MEMBER OF THE NOBILITY
IT WAS HIS MASTERPIECE...
BUT AFTER HE MARRIED, THE COFFIN DISAPPEARED. ALONG WITH ANY TRACE OF CHIZURU...

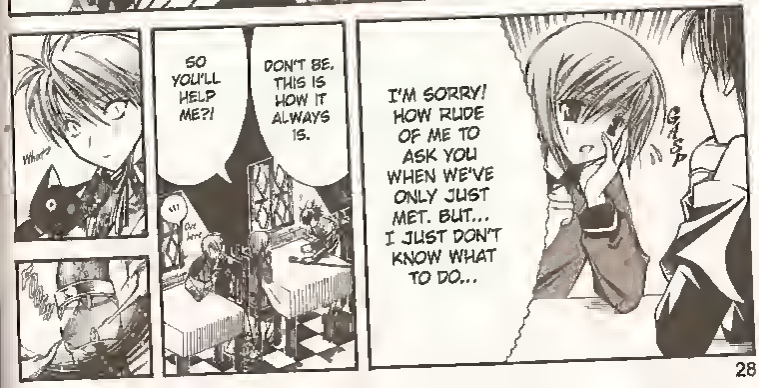
The Twenty-Eighth Night: Darkness

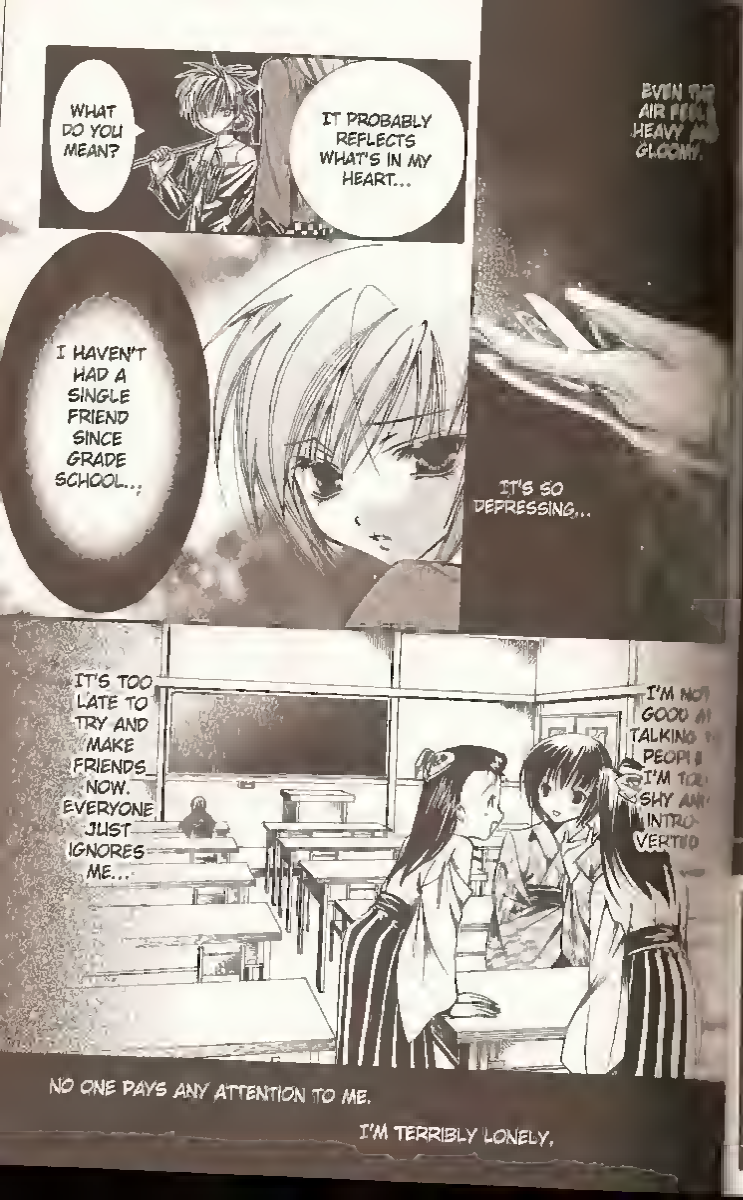


LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND


SOMEONE OR SOMETHING I CAN'T SEE ...
EVERY NOW AND THEN I SENSE A PRESENCE FAR AWAY
EXCEPT ...
IT'S COLD AND DARK AND THERE'S NOTHING BUT MYSELF


Ha ha ha. Look this way, Naamu!
CAN YOU FIND OUT WHO OR WHAT IT IS?
I'M TOO SCARED TO TRY TO GET NEAR IT.


What?
SO YOU'LL HELP ME?!
DON'T BE. THIS IS HOW IT ALWAYS IS.
I'M SORRY! HOW RUDE OF ME TO ASK YOU WHEN WE'VE ONLY JUST MET. BUT... I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...
GASP

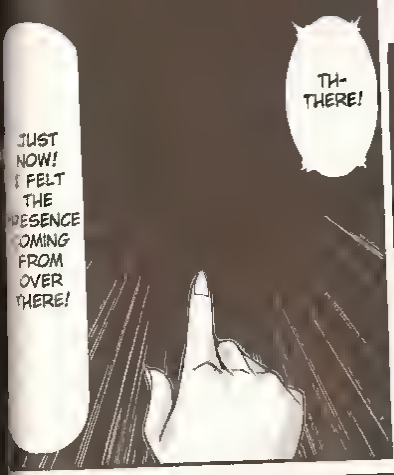

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
IT PROBABLY REFLECTS WHAT'S IN MY HEART...
I HAVEN'T HAD A SINGLE FRIEND SINCE GRADE SCHOOL...
EVEN THE AIR FEELS HEAVY AND GLOOMY.
IT'S SO DEPRESSING...
IT'S TOO LATE TO TRY AND MAKE FRIENDS NOW. EVERYONE JUST IGNORES ME...
I'M NOT GOOD AT TALKING TO PEOPLE. I'M TOO SHY AND INTROVERTED
NO ONE PAYS ANY ATTENTION TO ME.
I'M TERRIBLY LONELY.

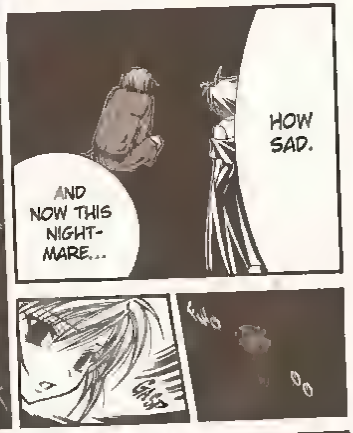
I'M SO SORRY THIS NIGHTMARE IS...
THIS IS HORRIBLE IT'S THE EMPTIEST NIGHTMARE I'VE EVER SEEN. IT'S BEYOND BORING.

BUT IT IS PRETTY PATHETIC.
I WASN'T CRITICIZING YOU.

SLIP
?!
A LAMP

THERE!
BUT IT'S STILL DARK...
THE AIR FEELS LIGHTER ALL OF A SUDDEN

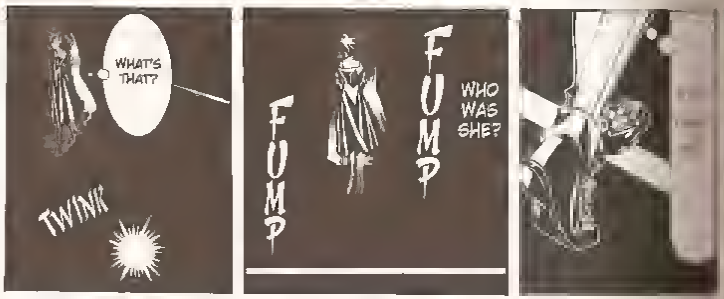

JUST NOW! I FELT THE PRESENCE COMING FROM OVER THERE!
TH-THERE!

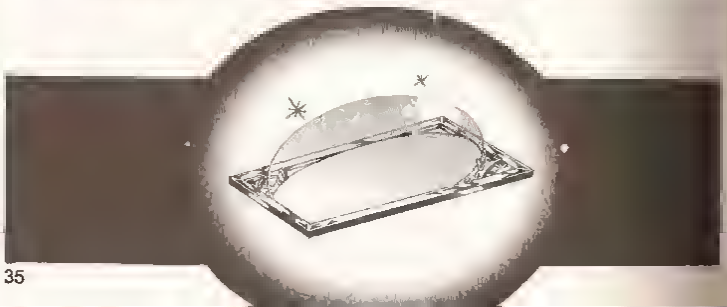

HOW SAD.
AND NOW THIS NIGHT-MARE...

FUMP
FUMP
I'LL GO AND TAKE A LOOK. Stay here.
PLEASE...
I'M SCARED... THERE'S SOMETHING THERE...

FUMP
FUMP
FUMP
THE AIR IS VERY HEAVY.
IT'S HARD TO WALK.

SHE DISAPPEARED.
NEVER MENTION HER TO ME AGAIN.
SHE MADE ME SICK


WHAT'S THAT?
TWINK
FUMP
FUMP
WHO WAS SHE?

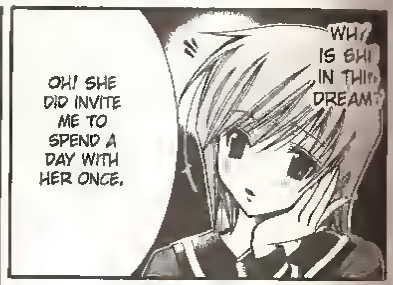


...THE ESENCE HE WAS EELING?
IS THIS ...
WHO ARE YOU? HOW DO YOU KNOW MUMEO?
WHAT?! I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH HER!
MUMEO?!

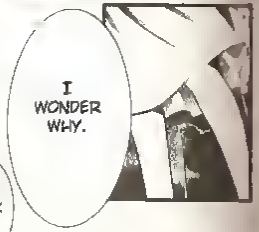
BUT SHE DIDN'T CARE FOR ME.
I REALLY WANTED TO BE HER FRIEND.

SHE'S ALWAYS CHEERFUL AND HAS LOTS OF FRIENDS. I WANTED TO BE LIKE HER

WHAT ?!
HUH?
MY BODY IS FLOATING ...


OH! SHE DID INVITE ME TO SPEND A DAY WITH HER ONCE.
WHY IS SHE IN THIS DREAM?

I THINK ...

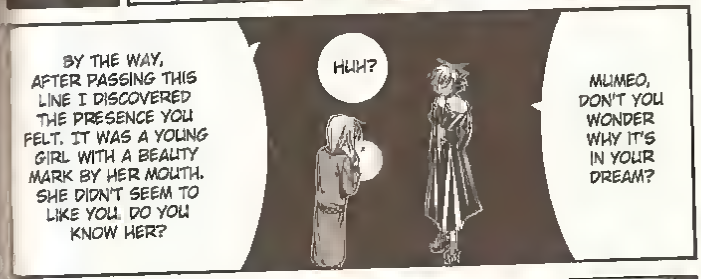

I WONDER WHY.

LOOKING FOR IT?

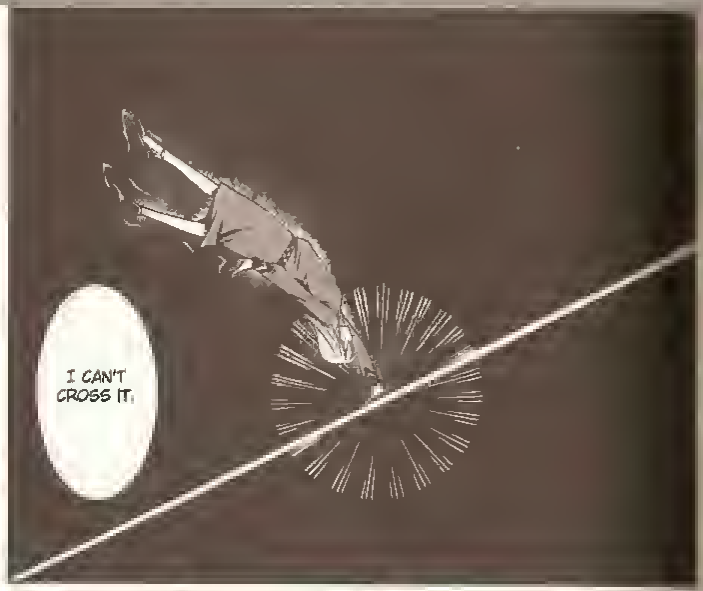
OH, I SEE

I NEVER TAKE IT OFF ...
I'VE BEEN LOOKING ALL OVER FOR THIS. MY DEAD MOTHER LEFT IT TO ME.

OH! IT'S THE BROOCH I LOST!


BY THE WAY, AFTER PASSING THIS LINE I DISCOVERED THE PRESENCE YOU FELT. IT WAS A YOUNG GIRL WITH A BEAUTY MARK BY HER MOUTH. SHE DIDN'T SEEM TO LIKE YOU. DO YOU KNOW HER?
HUH?
MUMEO, DON'T YOU WONDER WHY IT'S IN YOUR DREAM?

WILL YOU TELL ME ABOUT HER?
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN KIYOKO TOMOYA WE GO TO THE SAME SCHOOL.
A BEAUTY MARK...
YES...


I CAN'T CROSS IT.

SWP
SPLASH

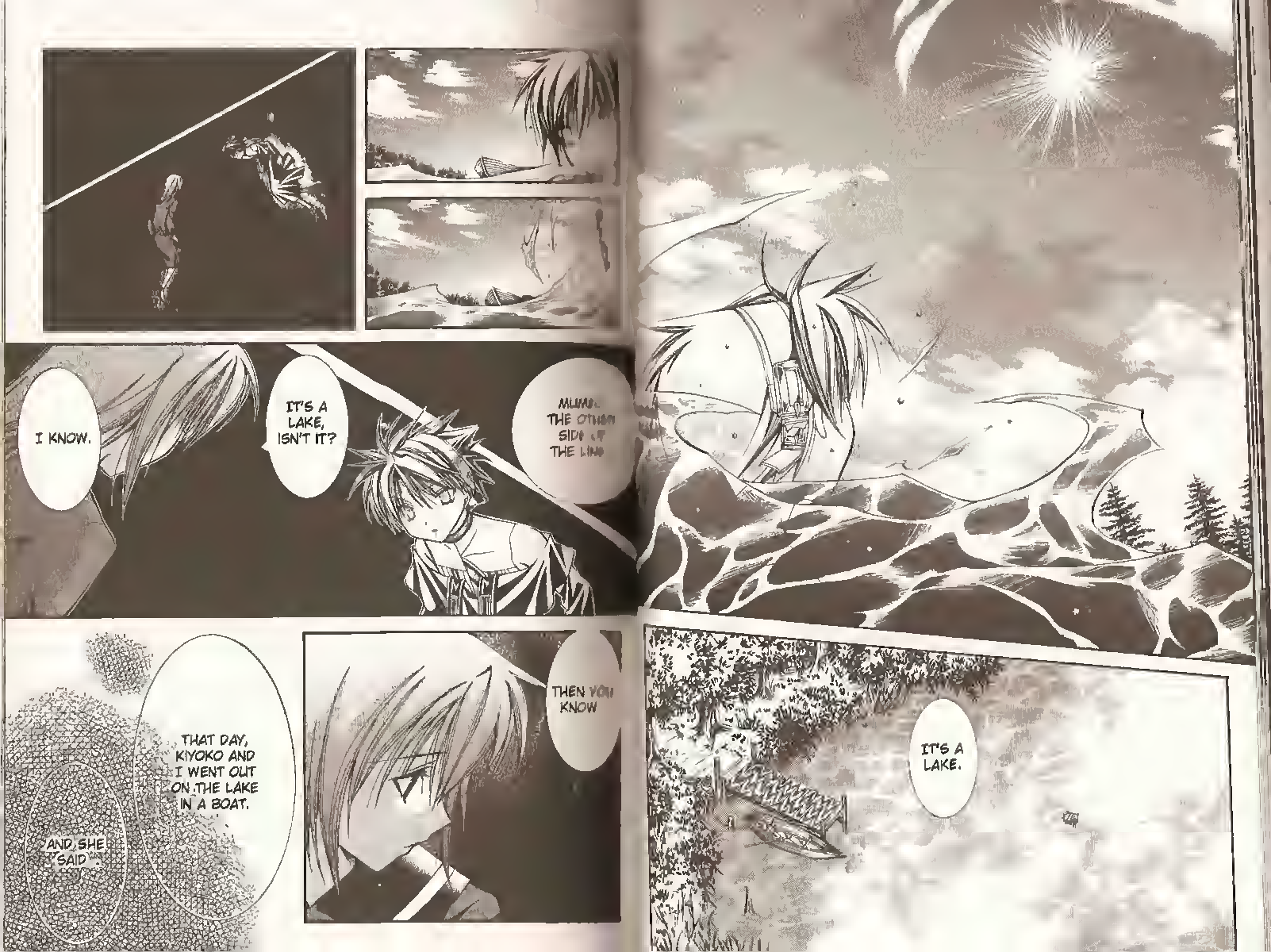
THE TRUTH ...

THAT'S RIGHT...
THAT DAY, WE...

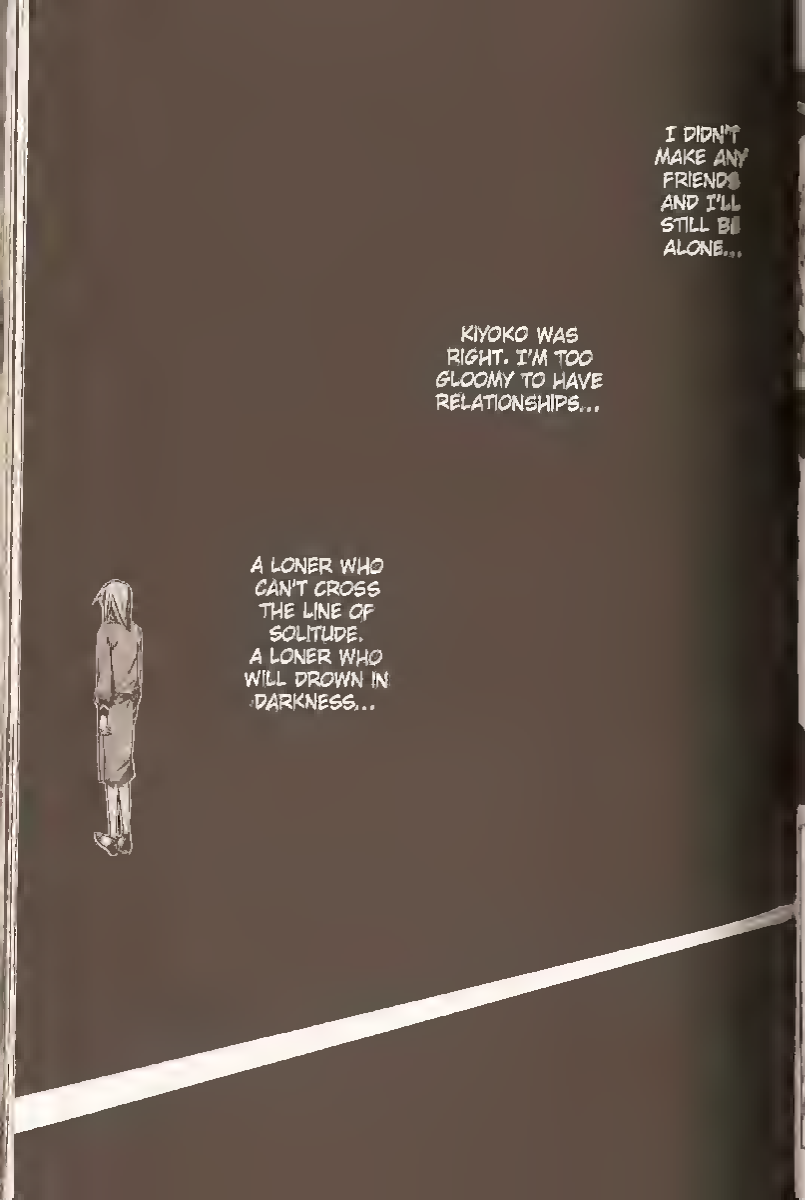
HELP ME, HIRUKO!

A LINE ...
THIS MUST BE WHAT HIRUKO MENTIONED

MUMEO, THE TRUTH IS STARTING TO MANIFEST IN YOUR DREAM.


I KNOW.
IT'S A LAKE, ISN'T IT?
MMM. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE
THEN YOU KNOW
THAT DAY, KIYOKO AND I WENT OUT ON THE LAKE IN A BOAT.
AND, SHE SAID...
IT'S A LAKE.

...SOMETHING THAT YOU TREASURE.
BY GIVING ME...
GIVE ME PROOF.
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED THAT BROOCH...
HUH?
DO YOU REALLY MEAN IT?
THEN...
!
YOUR INTROVERTED PERSONALITY DOESN'T GIVE PEOPLE A CHANCE TO APPROACH YOU
HARD FOR YOU HAVE ATION-SHIPS.
MUMEI, I'M GOING TO BE HONEST WITH YOU.
THAT'S WHY I THOUGHT THAT IF WE WERE ALONE, WE MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE TO TALK
I REALLY WANT US TO BE FRIENDS.
I LIKE YOU.
SO YOU DON'T WANT TO BE MY FRIEND?!
I CAN'T GIVE YOU THIS! NO!
SHUTT
WHY NOT?!
I'M SORR NOT THIS! MOTHER ME THIS
ISN'T IT WORTH MY FRIENDSHIP?!
NO, IT'S JUST... GIVE IT BA—
OF COURSE I DO! I REALLY ADMIRE YOU!
BUT I DON'T KNOW IF YOU WANT TO BE MY FRIEND..
KIYOKO? REALLY?! I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
?!


I DIDN'T MAKE ANY FRIENDS AND I'LL STILL BE ALONE...
KIYOKO WAS RIGHT. I'M TOO GLOOMY TO HAVE RELATIONSHIPS...
A LONER WHO CAN'T CROSS THE LINE OF SOLITUDE. A LONER WHO WILL DROWN IN DARKNESS...

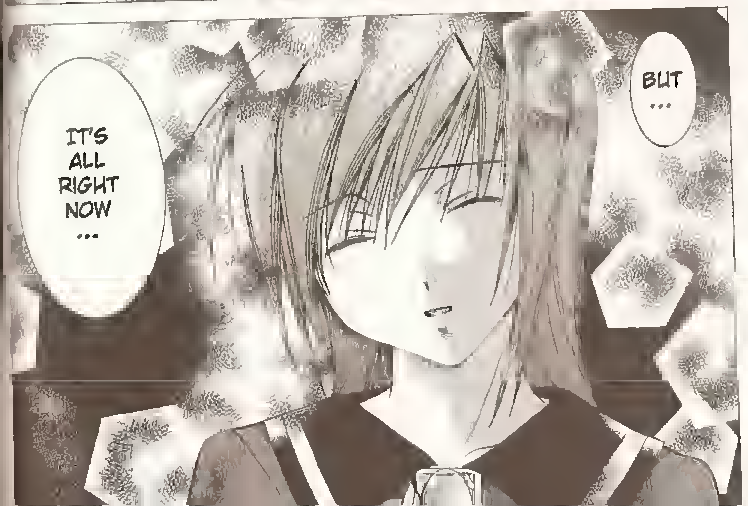
THAT'S RIGHT!
NOW I REALIZE THAT KIYOKO NEVER WANTED TO BE MY FRIEND. SHE JUST WANTED MY BROOCH...
I DIDN'T GET IT, SO I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU OR WITH WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY!
WHY ELSE WOULD I EVEN TALK TO YOU!
THAT'S WHAT THE REAL YOU WOULD SAY TOO.

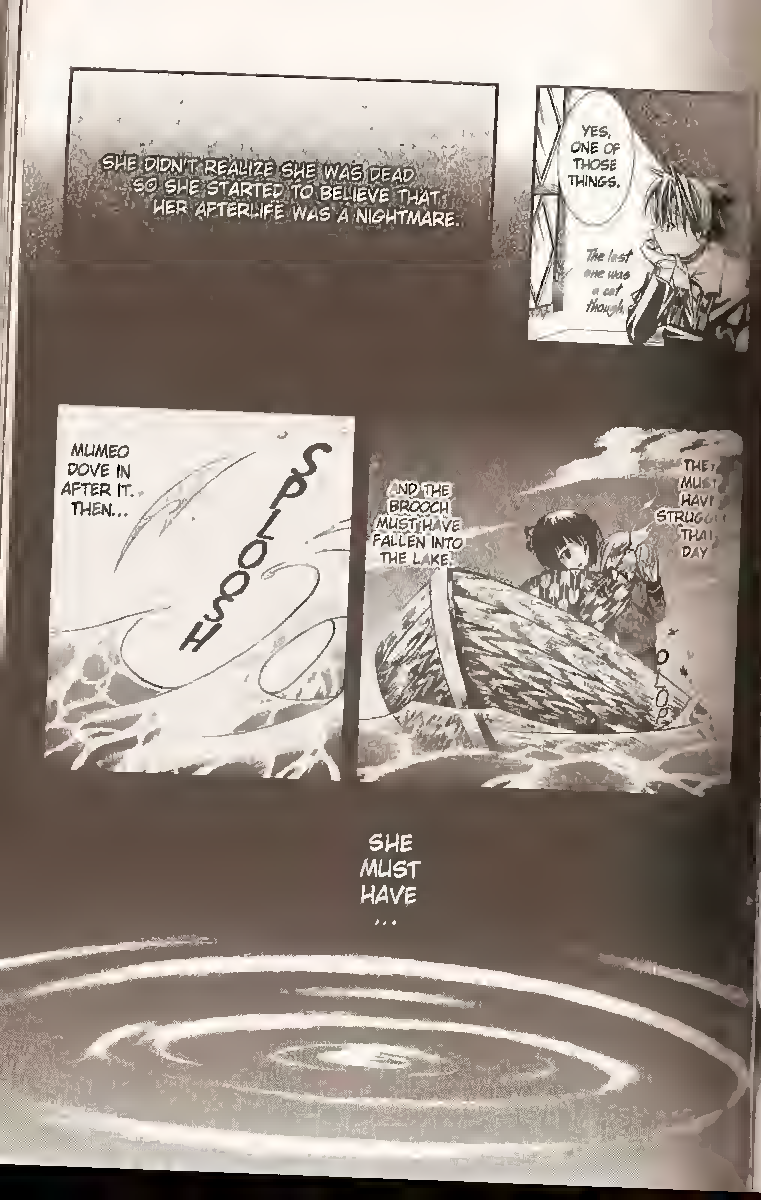
TIME TO WAKE UP.
FOOSH!

ARE YOU SURE? IF YOU GO BACK NOW YOU'LL STILL BE ALONE.

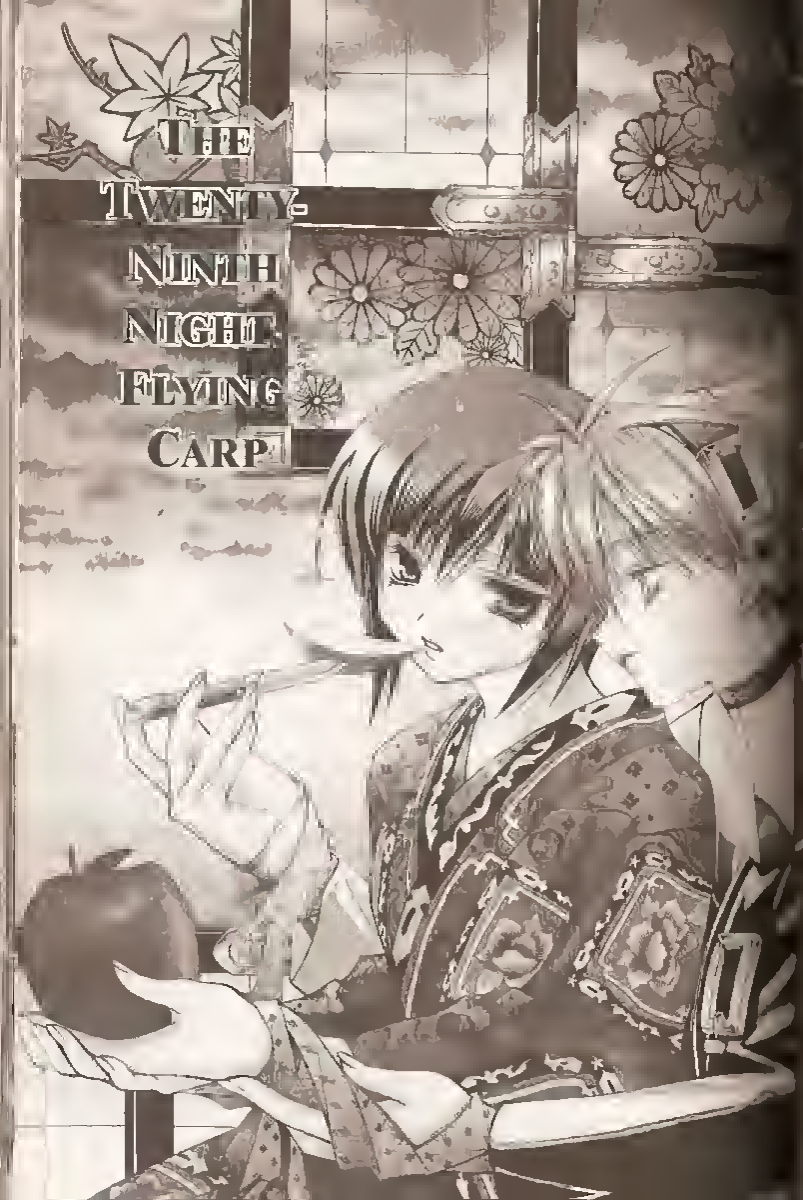
YES. AT LEAST HERE I HAD YOU.

HIRUKO I DON'T CARE ANYMORE... LET'S GO BACK


IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW ...
BUT ...


SHE DIDN'T REALIZE SHE WAS DEAD SO SHE STARTED TO BELIEVE THAT HER AFTERLIFE WAS A NIGHTMARE.
YES, ONE OF THOSE THINGS.
The last one was a cat though.
MUMEO DOVE IN AFTER IT. THEN...
SA-LOOSH
AND THE BROOCH MUST HAVE FALLEN INTO THE LAKE.
THEY MUST HAVE STRUGGLED THAT DAY
SHE MUST HAVE ...

HIRUKO'S BACK!
WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT?
THERE WAS NO CUSTOMER HERE, BUT YOU WAVED YOUR CANE AND DISAPPEARED!
A CUSTOMER? THAT I COULDN'T SEE?
BUT I GUESS YOU COULDN'T SEE HER...
I DID HAVE A CUSTOMER.
AND LOOK, IT'S EMPTY!
THAT WAS WEIRD!
DID SOMETHING COME AGAIN?!
MEOW
Naomi, is that what you saw?!
DOES HE MEAN...!



...DEEP IN THE DARK AND HEAVY WATER.

AND SHE AND HER BROOCH WERE BELOW IT...

SEPARATING ABOVE AND BELOW THE WATER SURFACE.

THE LINE IN HER DREAM REPRESENTED THE SURFACE OF THE LAKE.

UNABLE TO CROSS THE LINE TO COME BACK UP, SHE TOOK HER LAST GASPS OF BREATH.

...NEVER TO RETURN TO OUR WORLD AGAIN...

I WENT FOR A WALK THIS AFTERNOON AND SAW THE FLYING CARPS* DANCING IN THE SKY OUTSIDE ALL THE HOUSES.

UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS...

THEY COME TO THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE...

...SEEKING SOLACE.

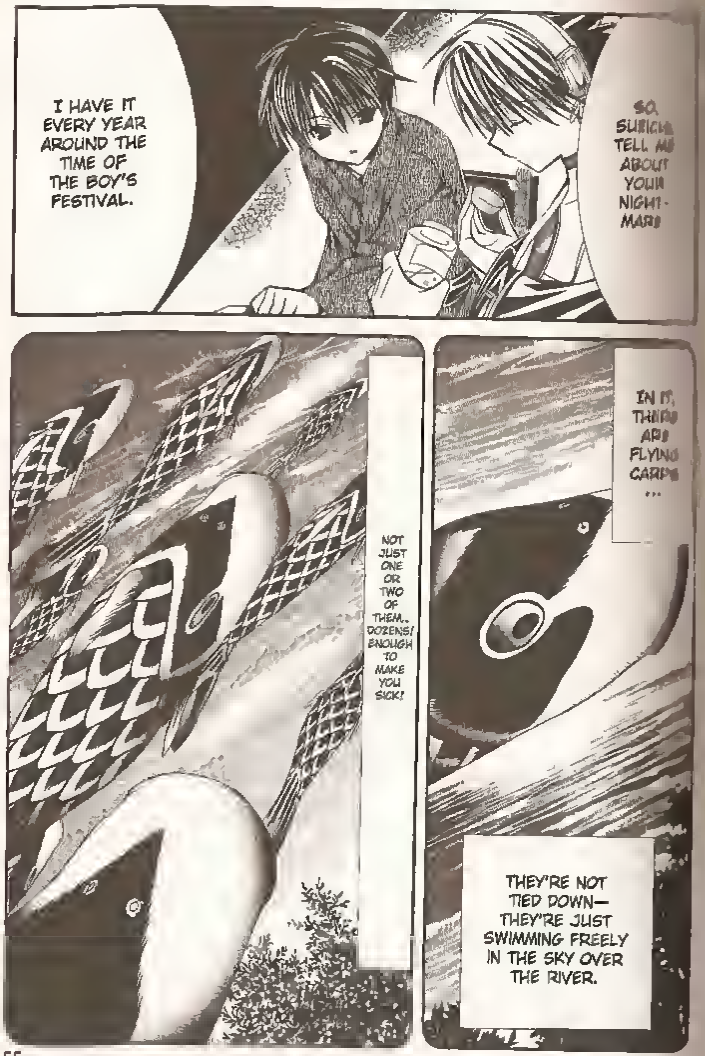
*CALLED "KOINOBORI," THESE CARP-SHAPED BANNERS CELEBRATE BOY'S DAY (NOW CALLED CHILDREN'S DAY) IN MAY. HOUSEHOLDS WITH MALE CHILDREN HANG THEM IN FRONT OF THEIR HOUSES.

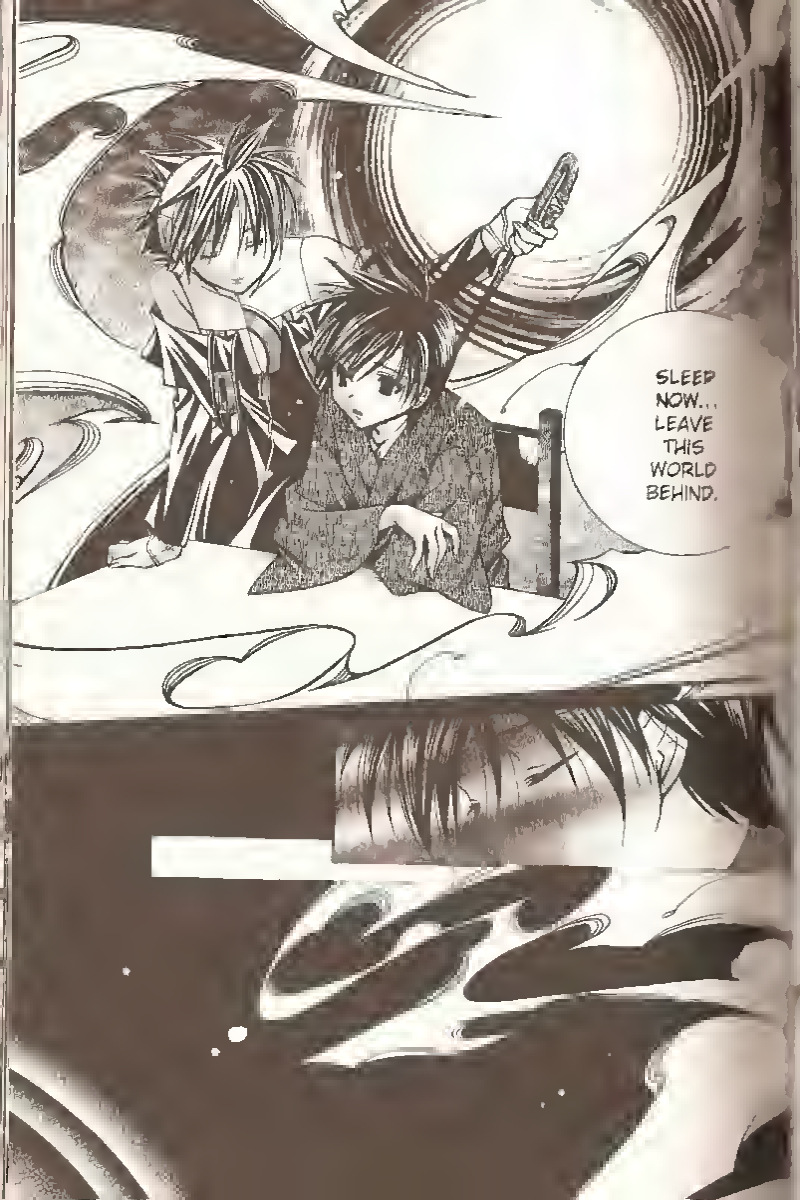
YES, WE HAD IT SPECIALLY MADE SO IT WOULD STAND OUT. IT LOOKS LIKE THIS...

I GUESS IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN. DID YOU HAVE THEM AT YOUR HOUSE?

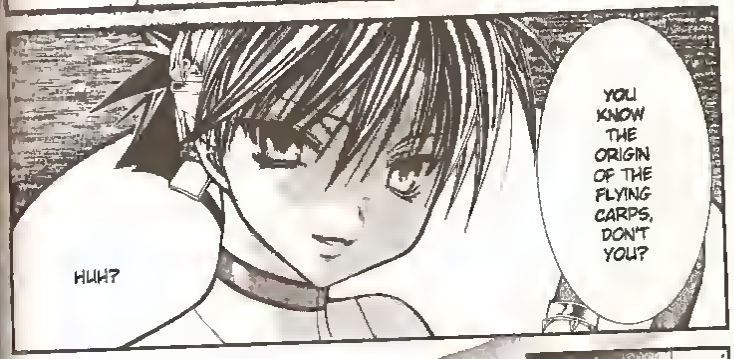
DING

OH...


GOOD EVENING.
I'M SUEICHI MIGURIYA.
SORRY TO COME BY SO LATE, BUT I CAME FROM FAR AWAY. I CAME ABOUT A NIGHTMARE...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. PLEASE, SIT DOWN.
SO, SUEICHI, TELL ME ABOUT YOUR NIGHT-MARE.
I HAVE IT EVERY YEAR AROUND THE TIME OF THE BOY'S FESTIVAL.
IN IT, THERE ARE FLYING CARPS...
THEY'RE NOT TIED DOWN— THEY'RE JUST SWIMMING FREELY IN THE SKY OVER THE RIVER.
NOT JUST ONE OR TWO OF THEM.. DOZENS! ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU SICK!


SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

THE THOUGHT OF HAVING THE SAME NIGHTMARE AGAIN THIS YEAR WAS SO DAUNTING...
CAN YOU HELP ME, HIRUKO?!
...IS THAT REALLY ALL YOUR NIGHTMARE IS?


YOU KNOW THE ORIGIN OF THE FLYING CARPS, DON'T YOU?
HUH?

CLACK
HEH. LOOKS LIKE THERE'S MORE TO THIS...
CLACK
LET'S TAKE A LOOK.

THERE... LOOK OVER THERE.
HUH?
AH, FOUND IT.
HMM.
YES, IT'S IN MY HOMETOWN I USED TO PLAY HERE WHEN I WAS LITTLE
AH!

SUEICHI, DO YOU KNOW THIS RIVER?
THERE ARE SO MANY... I FEEL NAUSEOUS.

HIRUKO..
IS THERE SOMEONE IN THERE?
WILL YOU GO AND LOOK?
HIRUKO.
...I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING.
WAIT...
I'VE SEEN THAT BEFORE. YEARS AGO...
...SO I TRIED TO ERASE IT FROM MY MEMORY
THAT'S RIGHT.. IT MADE ME FEEL SICK...
WHAT THE—?!
THERE ARE LEGS COMING OUT OF THAT ONE! HUMAN LEGS!
THAT'S STRANGE...
THE LEGS USED TO BE SHORTER..
THEY'RE GROWING!
WHICH MEANS...

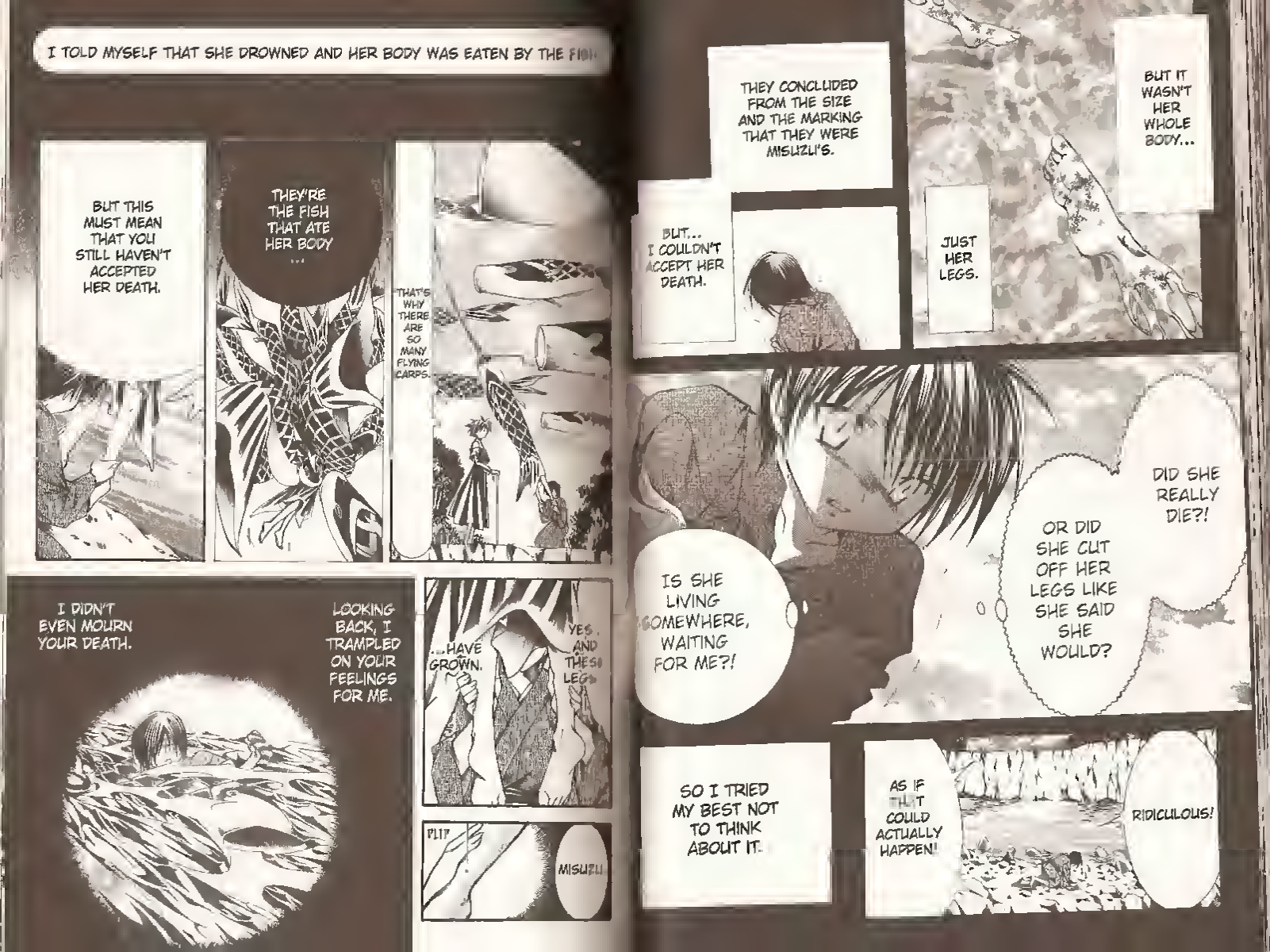
SHE WAS A CHILDHOOD FRIEND. SHE WAS A LITTLE STRANGE.
WHO'S MISUZU? SO YOU KNOW WHOSE LEGS THESE ARE?
UM... YES...
AND HUNG IT ABOVE THE RIVER LIKE IN THIS DREAM.
ONE BOY'S FESTIVAL SHE TOOK THE FLYING CARP FROM OUR HOUSE WITHOUT ASKING.
MISUZU, WHY DID YOU DO THIS?

JUST LOOK AT IT!
WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?
THIS ...
OH!
HUH?
JUST LIKE THE ONE ON MISUZU'S LEGS.
THIS MARK LOOKS LIKE A FISH ..
...ARE MISUZU'S?
DOES THAT MEAN THESE LEGS ...
WHAT—?! DON'T BRING IT HERE!
TAKE A LOOK AT THIS!

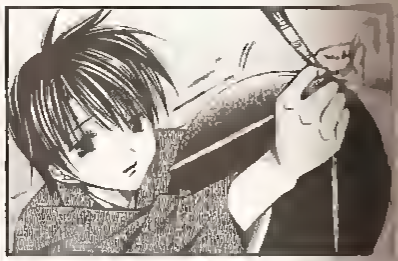
THEN I WILL BECOME THE CARP.
AND LIKE A CARP, FLY INTO THE HEAVENS, BECOMING A DRAGON I WILL BE THERE FOR YOU
THEN WE CAN BE TOGETHER FOREVER
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS...
WILL YOU ACCEPT ME?
THEN ONE DAY WE'LL BE TOGETHER
DO YOU KNOW THE ORIGIN OF THE FLYING CARPS?
IT WAS FOR YOU.
Tee Hee
THE CARP SYMBOLIZES BOYS OVERCOMING ADVERSITY TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN THEIR LIFE
THE STORY IS THAT THE CARP SWAM UPSTREAM AGAINST THE STRONG CURRENT. WHEN IT MADE IT SUCCESSFULLY, IT TURNED INTO A DRAGON
I'M NOT BRAVE ENOUGH TO BE A CARP
YOUR HAPPINESS IS MY HAPPINESS
I'M HOPING FOR YOUR FUTURE HAPPINESS.
SO BY HANGING THE FLYING CARP OVER THE RIVER LIKE THIS...
Tee Hee

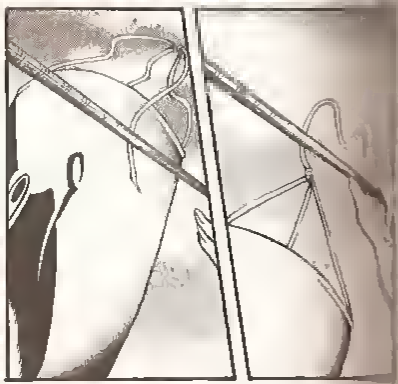
I DON'T WANT YOU TO GET HURT.
I DON'T MIND!
SO I...
I'LL COME BACK NOW...
SEE
OKAY?
WITH
THEY FOUND HER BODY DOWNSTREAM A FEW DAYS LATER.

RUSTLE
...NOT NORMAL..
YES, FOR YOUR SAKE... IT'S NOTHING...
THE WAY SHE EXPRESSES HER LOVE IS OVER-THE-TOP I'M...
EVEN CUTTING OFF MY LEGS...
...
DOES SHE MEAN MARRIAGE? THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANT...
AH, THE FLYING CARP!
SWIP
COME BACK! I'LL GO!
NO!
MISUZU! IT'S DANGEROUS!
SPLASH
THE CURRENT'S TOO STRONG!
DASH
!


I TOLD MYSELF THAT SHE DROWNED AND HER BODY WAS EATEN BY THE FISH
BUT THIS MUST MEAN THAT YOU STILL HAVEN'T ACCEPTED HER DEATH.
THEY'RE THE FISH THAT ATE HER BODY...
THAT'S WHY THERE ARE SO MANY FLYING CARPS.
I DIDN'T EVEN MOURN YOUR DEATH.
LOOKING BACK, I TRAMPLED ON YOUR FEELINGS FOR ME.
...HAVE GROWN.
YES. AND THESE LEGS
PLIP
MISUZU
THEY CONCLUDED FROM THE SIZE AND THE MARKING THAT THEY WERE MISUZU'S.
BUT... I COULDN'T ACCEPT HER DEATH.
BUT IT WASN'T HER WHOLE BODY...
JUST HER LEGS.
IS SHE LIVING SOMEWHERE, WAITING FOR ME?!
OR DID SHE CUT OFF HER LEGS LIKE SHE SAID SHE WOULD?
DID SHE REALLY DIE?!
SO I TRIED MY BEST NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT.
AS IF THAT COULD ACTUALLY HAPPEN!
RIDICULOUS!

I WILL ACCEPT HER DEATH...

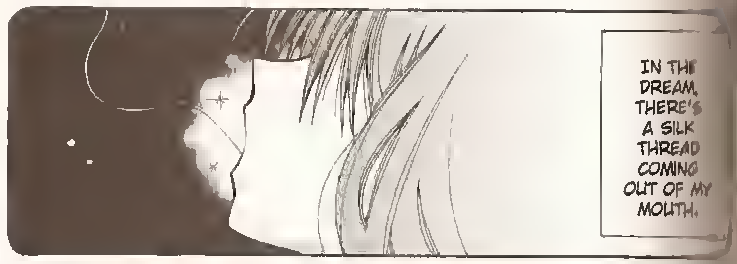


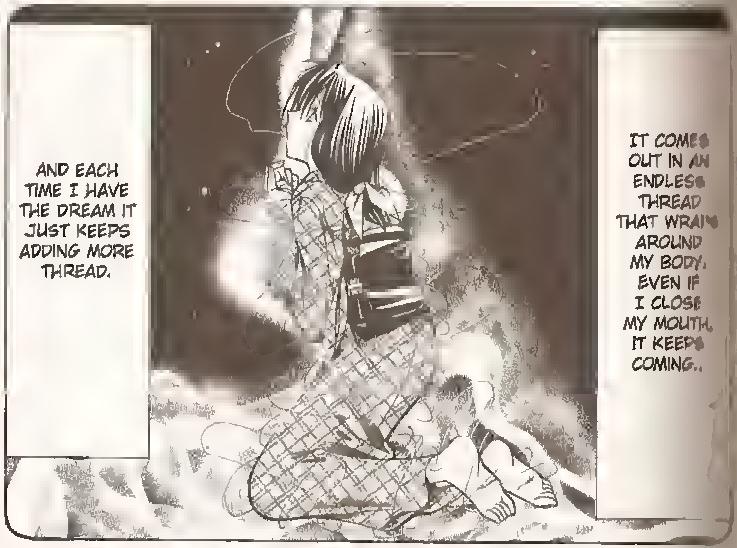


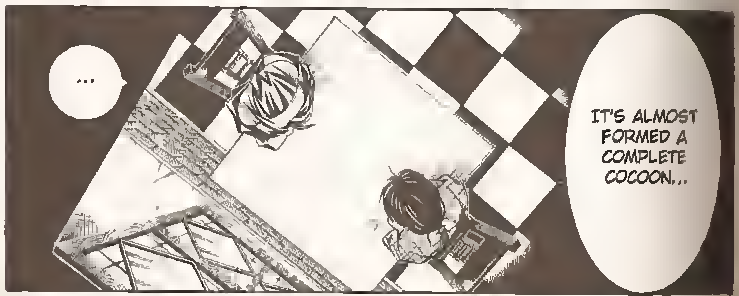
...
THANK YOU, HIRUKO. I CAN SAY GOOD-BYE TO THIS DREAM NOW.
GOOD-BYE, MISUZU.
RETURN TO THE HEAVENS.
SNIFF
TIME TO WAKE UP.

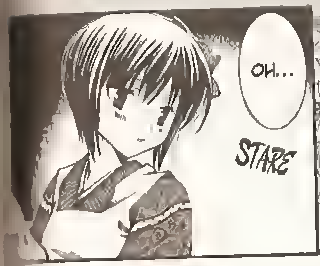
HEH HEH. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO SUEICHI'S DREAM TONIGHT.
"THEN ONE DAY WE'LL BE TOGETHER."
AH...
AH...
"WILL YOU ACCEPT ME?"
WHY AM I HERE AGAIN?!
HAS MISUZU COME BACK?!
THE FLYING CARPS ARE GONE THOUGH...
IS THAT ...?
I CAN BELIEVE SOMEONE COULD LOVE THAT MUCH.
FOR THE ONE SHE LOVED
MAYBE MISUZU REALLY DID CUT OFF HER OWN LEGS.
HE ALSO ACCEPTED HER WORDS THAT SHE WOULD BECOME A CARP.
HE ACCEPTED MISUZU'S DEATH, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND...
HUH?
HEH HEH
WAS IT REALLY ONLY SUEICHI WHO WAS RELEASED?
I'M GLAD SUEICHI COULD FINALLY BE RELEASED FROM HIS GUILT...
RELEASED ER FROM R ROPE...
...AND SOARED INTO THE AIR AS IF SHE HAD TURNED INTO A DRAGON.
THE PROOF IS THAT SHE WAS STILL IN THE SHAPE OF A FLYING CARP...

THE THIRTIETH NIGHT: METAMORPHOSIS
SEEING SOLACE
ALICE
SILENCE
...
DING
I WASN'T CLOCKER
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR HIFUMI, HE'S MEETING WITH THE "RUMOR CLUB."
"NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS..."
"THEN WE CAN BE TOGETHER FOREVER."


IN THE DREAM, THERE'S A SILK THREAD COMING OUT OF MY MOUTH.


AND EACH TIME I HAVE THE DREAM IT JUST KEEPS ADDING MORE THREAD.
IT COMES OUT IN AN ENDLESS THREAD THAT WRAPS AROUND MY BODY. EVEN IF I CLOSE MY MOUTH, IT KEEPS COMING..


...
IT'S ALMOST FORMED A COMPLETE COCOON...


OH...
STARE

IS... IS THERE SOMETHING ON MY FACE?
NO, IT'S JUST THAT YOU'RE SO BEAUTIFUL ... So sorry.

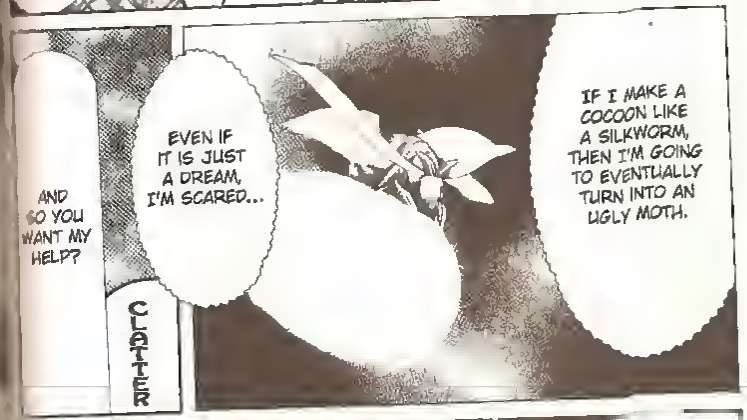
OH! YOU'RE TOO KIND.

GOOD EVENING. I'M KONO INUZUKA.
IS HIRUKO THE BAKU HERE?

I'M HAVING THIS TERRIFYING NIGHTMARE WHERE I'M CHANGING... AND AT A TIME LIKE THIS, IT'S REALLY STRESSFUL!
THE THING IS, I'M GETTING MARRIED SOON TO A WONDERFUL MAN. I DON'T THINK I'M WORTHY OF HIM, WHICH IS WHY I'M SO DEPRESSED.
So, thank you.

I WANT TO SEE YOUR TRUE FORM
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
FWIP!
SLIDE NOW
LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND

ISN'T IT FITTING THAT A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN SHOULD BE CLAD IN BEAUTIFUL SILK?
BUT THIS IS A COCOON!


IF I MAKE A COCOON LIKE A SILKWORM, THEN I'M GOING TO EVENTUALLY TURN INTO AN UGLY MOTH.
EVEN IF IT IS JUST A DREAM, I'M SCARED...
AND SO YOU WANT MY HELP?
CLOTHER

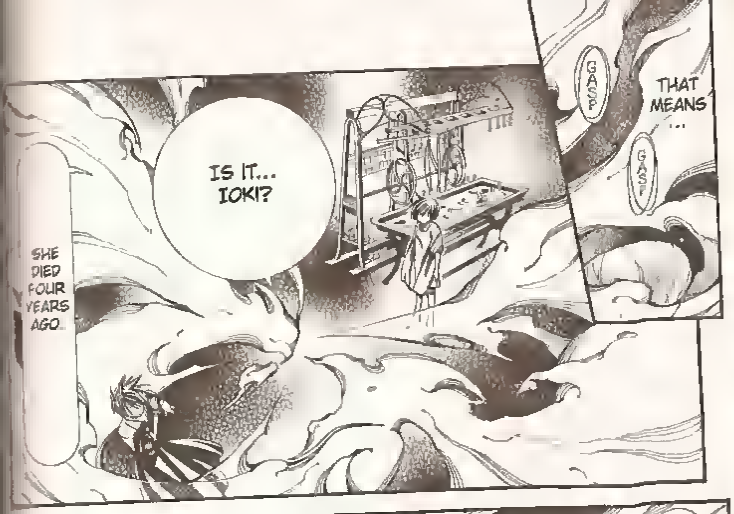
BUT KONO, LIKE THE MOTH THAT EMERGES FROM THE COCOON, IT SPREADS ITS WINGS AND BECOMES ITS TRUE FORM...
PERHAPS IN YOUR DREAM, YOU CAN EMERGE FROM YOUR COCOON TO BECOME YOUR TRUE SELF AS WELL.

I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME! THE COCOON IS ALMOST COMPLETE...
PLEASE... HELP ME, HIRUKO!
?!
HIRUKO, WHY ARE YOU SO BIG...?!
NO, KONO, YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S SMALL.
THIS REALLY IS A COCOON. IF I METAMORPHOSE, I'LL TURN INTO A MOTH...
I WAS ALWAYS ALONE IN MY DREAM SO I NEVER REALIZED.
N-NO!
HEH HEH... THERE'S NOT MUCH WE CAN DO.
NO...
?!
FOSHIOSH

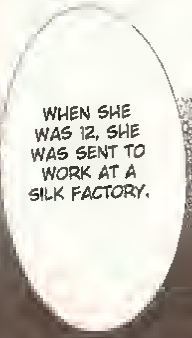
THAT'S HOW YOU KILL THE SILKWORM INSIDE THE COCOON.
SHE'S A FAC-TORY GIRL.
KONO... THERE'S A GIRL NEXT TO A LOOM.
THAT VOICE...

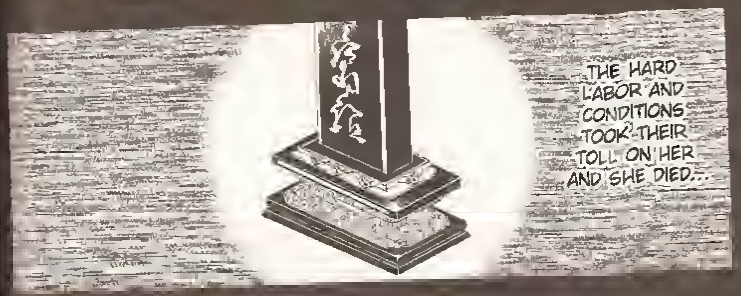
I'M STEAMING UP IN HERE... I'M GOING TO DIE! HELP ME!
WHAT'S HAPPENING? IT'S HOT!
BOILED TO DEATH.

IF ONLY I WERE HEALTHIER... I SHOULD HAVE GONE, NOT YOU.
FORGIVE ME, IOKI...
WHY ME?!
SHE DIDN'T WANT TO GO
YOU! GET TO STAY AT HOME! I HATE YOU!
WHY DO I HAVE TO GO?!
I WISH THAT I WAS SICKLY.
AP


IS IT... IOKI?
SHE DIED FOUR YEARS AGO.
GASP
GASP
THAT MEANS ...

DIED?
IOKI WAS MY OLDER SISTER.


WHEN SHE WAS 12, SHE WAS SENT TO WORK AT A SILK FACTORY.


THE HARD LABOR AND CONDITIONS TOOK THEIR TOLL ON HER AND SHE DIED...

DRY IT.
DRY IT..
KONO IS DEAD...
THE SILK-WORM IS DEAD...
REEL IT OUT.
SPIN THE THREAD...
BOIL IT...
"KONO" IS BEING WOVEN INTO CLOTH...
SSSS-
SO THAT'S IT...
SOR...
...
THIS DREAM... SHE'S MAKING ME FEEL THE SAME PAIN SHE FELT...
IOKI IS DEAD. SHE MUST HATE ME.
IT'S SO HOT...
IT HURTS SO MUCH...
I'M... SORRY... IO...

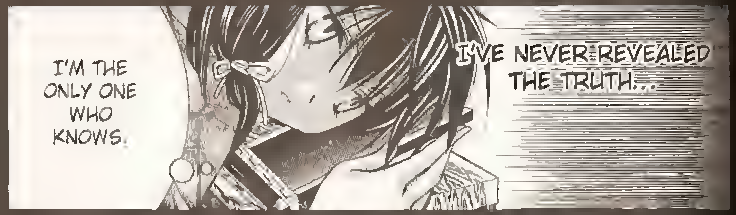
RIP
I WASN'T THE ONE INDENTURED AT AGE 12...
RIP
IT WASN'T ME WHO DIED FOUR YEARS AGO...
RIP
RIP
I WAS NEVER THIS GIRL...
RIP

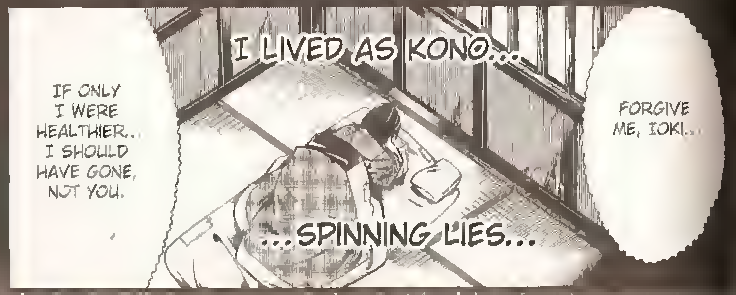
IT'S SO PRET-TY...
IT WAS WOVEN FROM THE LIES YOU TOLD PRETENDING TO BE YOUR YOUNGER SISTER.
THERE WERE SO MANY LIES THAT THEY MADE A LARGE PIECE OF CLOTH.
BUT NOW I'LL DISCARD IT LIKE AN OLD RAG.
LIES?
PRE-TENDING?
I CAN NO LONGER BEAR THE WEIGHT OF MY GUILT.
THESE LIES I'VE COVERED MY BODY IN... IT'S TIME TO TAKE THEM OFF.

SAY GOODBYE TO KONO...
TIME TO WAKE UP.
I HAVE TO ACCEPT THE REAL ME...

BUT I DIDN'T GO. MY TWIN SISTER, "KONO," WENT INSTEAD.
WHY ME?!
I DIDN'T WANT TO BE SENT TO A FACTORY FOR SEVEN YEARS...
YOU GET TO STAY AT HOME! I HATE YOU!
WHY DO I HAVE TO GO?!
I WISH THAT I WAS SICKLY.
WHAT?
IT'S ALL RIGHT, IOKI... I'LL GO INSTEAD.
YOU'RE RIGHT WE'RE SO SIMILAR THAT NO ONE WOULD NOTICE
WE'RE TWINS! WHY DO ONLY I HAVE TO GO?

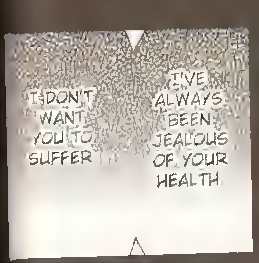
SHE...
HIRUKO?
WHAT HAPPENED?
THE OLDER SISTER, IOKI?!
SHE ISN'T KONO. SHE'S IOKI.
THAT'S WHEN MY PARENTS TOLD ME I WAS BEING SENT TO A FACTORY.
BECAUSE...
WHY DID SHE DO THAT?
FROM THE AGE OF 12, IOKI BELIEVED THAT SHE WAS KONO. UNTIL TODAY...

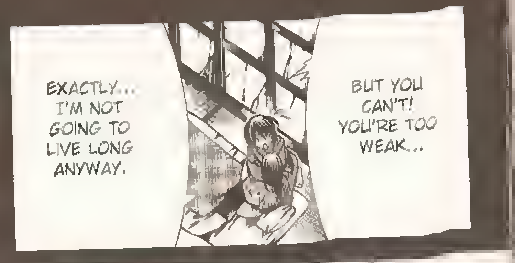

I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS.
I'VE NEVER REVEALED THE TRUTH...


I LIVED AS KONO...
IF ONLY I WERE HEALTHIER.. I SHOULD HAVE GONE, NOT YOU.
FORGIVE ME, IOKI..
...SPINNING LIES...

...AND BECAME THIS NIGHT-MARE...

FOR-GETTING YOUR GUILT, THE LIES JUST WRAPPED AROUND YOU...
THEN YOU REALLY DID BELIEVE THAT YOU WERE KONO.
AND ...


I DON'T WANT YOU TO SUFFER
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN JEALOUS OF YOUR HEALTH


EXACTLY... I'M NOT GOING TO LIVE LONG ANYWAY.
BUT YOU CAN'T! YOU'RE TOO WEAK...

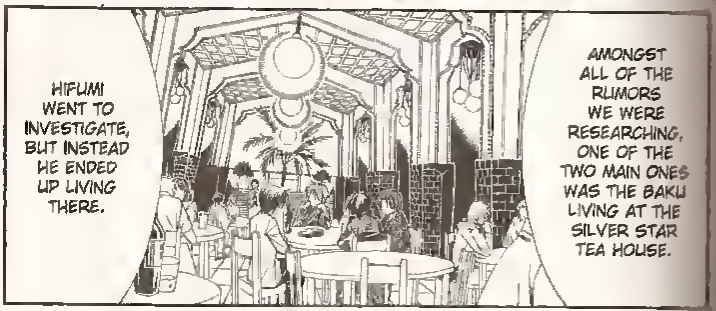
YOU'LL STAY HERE AND LIVE AS KONO.
FROM NOW ON I'M IOKI. I'LL GO TO THE FACTORY.

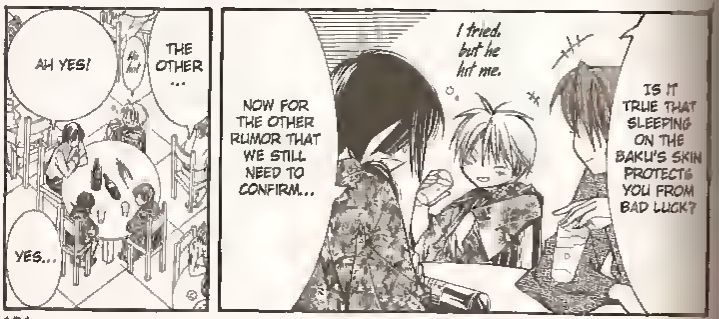
I...
I...
OKAY? IT'LL BE OUR SECRET, "KONO"...
I TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HER OFFER...
EVENTUALLY KONO GOT EVEN SICKER AND DIED...

I'LL HAVE TO LIVE MY LIFE AS KONO...
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I LOVE HIM, HE'LL NEVER KNOW THE TRUE ME.
HIS AFFECTION ... HIS SMILE ... IT'S ALL FOR KONO!
BUT HE DOESN'T MEAN ME!
...SO DO I TELL THE TRUTH?
I CAN'T. EVERYONE HAS BURIED IOKI IN THEIR MINDS!
YOKO KIKUCHI
I'M ALREADY DEAD!
IT'S MY NAME ON THAT GRAVE STONE..
WHO AM I?!
THEN...
GASP
I'M JUST PROOF THAT I DIED AND KONO LIVES..

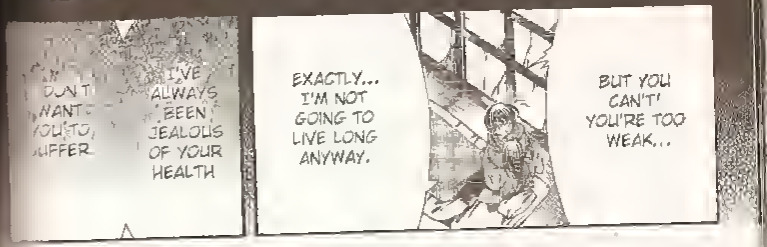
CLAP
CONGRATULATIONS, IOKI.
CLAP
...AND FINALLY ACCEPTED YOURSELF AS IOKI.
YOU KILLED THE FAKE KONO TO PURGE YOUR GUILT...
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
YOU GOT YOUR CONSCIENCE BACK AND METAMORPHOSED INTO THE TRUE YOU.
HE SAYS HE LIKES HOW KIND AND GENTLE I AM. BUT...
TO A WONDERFUL MAN...
I'M GETTING MARRIED SOON.
CLAP
CLAP

The Thirty-First Night: Like-Minded

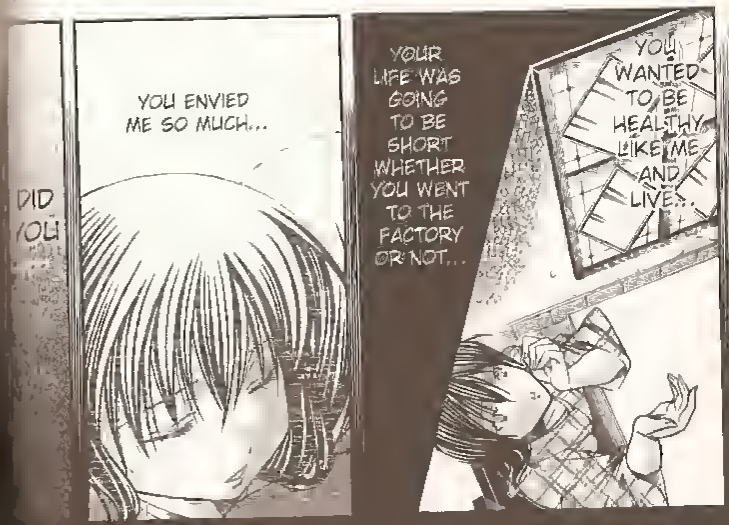

HIFUMI WENT TO INVESTIGATE, BUT INSTEAD HE ENDED UP LIVING THERE.
AMONGST ALL OF THE RUMORS WE WERE RESEARCHING, ONE OF THE TWO MAIN ONES WAS THE BAKU LIVING AT THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE.


AH YES!
THE OTHER...
YES...
NOW FOR THE OTHER RUMOR THAT WE STILL NEED TO CONFIRM...
I tried, but he hit me.
IS IT TRUE THAT SLEEPING ON THE BAKU'S SKIN PROTECTS YOU FROM BAD LUCK?

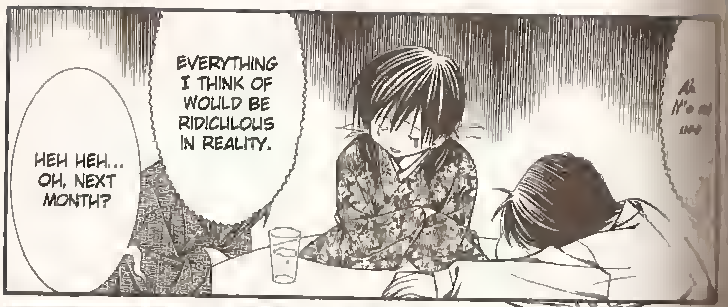
I DIED... AND KONO LIVED.


I DON'T WANT YOU TO SUFFER.
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN JEALOUS OF YOUR HEALTH
EXACTLY... I'M NOT GOING TO LIVE LONG ANYWAY.
BUT YOU CAN'T! YOU'RE TOO WEAK...

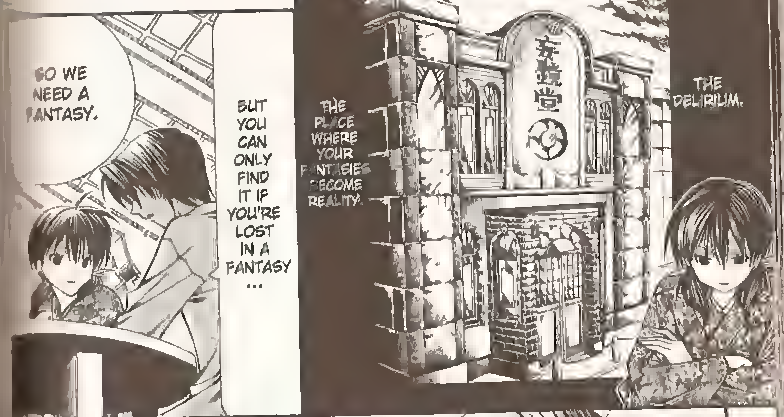
KONO...


DID YOU...
YOU ENVIED ME SO MUCH...
YOUR LIFE WAS GOING TO BE SHORT WHETHER YOU WENT TO THE FACTORY OR NOT...
YOU WANTED TO BE HEALTHY LIKE ME AND LIVE...

...INTEND TO WIPE OUT MY EXISTENCE AND EXTEND YOUR OWN?

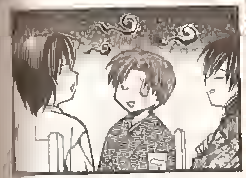

EVERYTHING I THINK OF WOULD BE RIDICULOUS IN REALITY.
HEH HEH... OH, NEXT MONTH?

I'M GETTING MARRIED NEXT MONTH!
EVERY-ONE!
?!
I CAN'T WAIT, MIZUKI. ♡

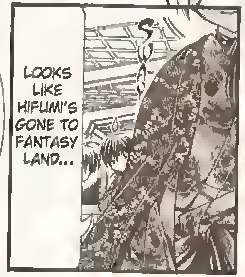

SO WE NEED A FANTASY.
BUT YOU CAN ONLY FIND IT IF YOU'RE LOST IN A FANTASY ...
THE PLACE WHERE YOUR FANTASIES BECOME REALITY.
THE DELIRIUM.

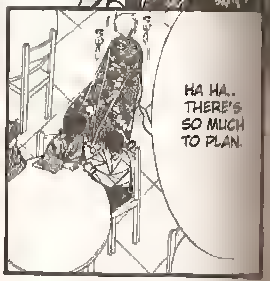
WELL, WE CAN TRY.
WE JUST NEED TO FANTASIZE ABOUT A WISH THAT WE'RE DESPERATE TO MAKE REAL.

FANTASIZING...

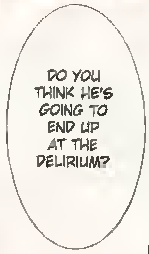


I DON'T NEED TO FANTASIZE. 'CAUSE ONE DAY I'LL MARRY MIZUKI AND WE'LL...
HMPH, THAT'S SO POINT-LESS


LOOKS LIKE HIFUMI'S GONE TO FANTASY LAND...

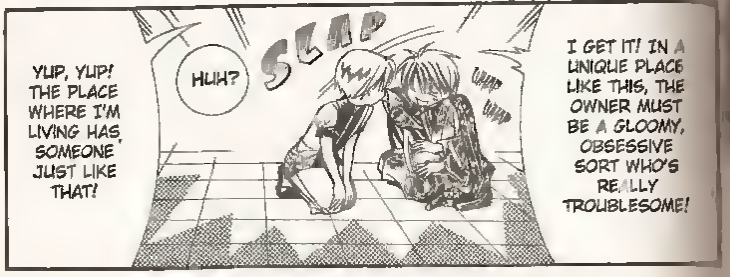

HA HA.. THERE'S SO MUCH TO PLAN.

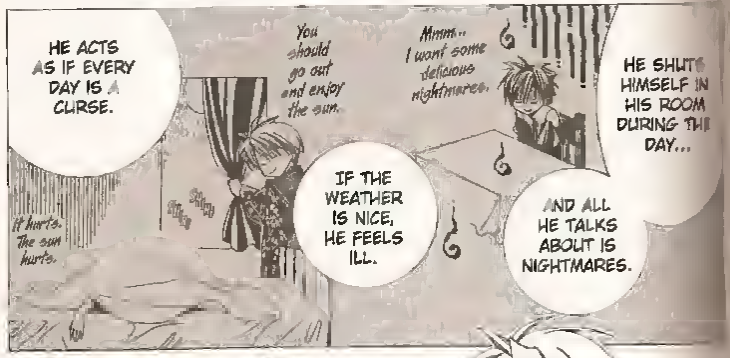
NO WAY.


DO YOU THINK HE'S GOING TO END UP AT THE DELIRIUM?

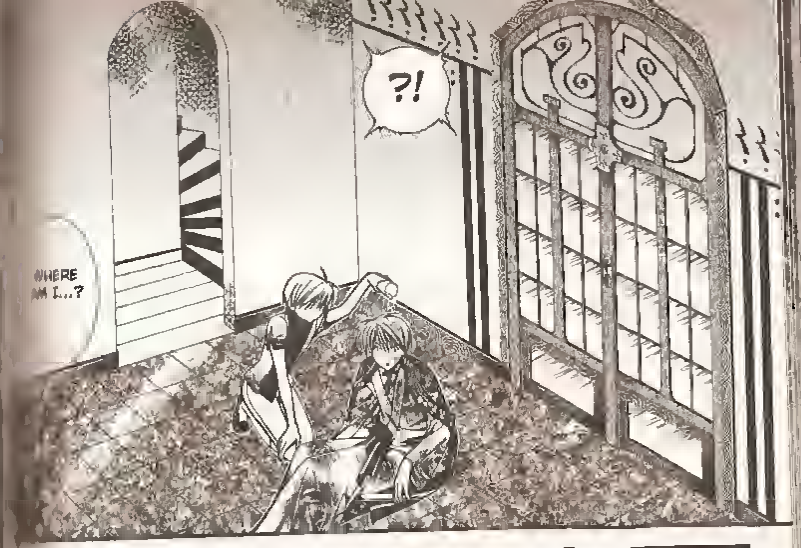
IT'S GOING TO BE SO GREAT...
THE SMELL OF PERFUME WAFTING IN THE AIR...
THAT'S RIGHT. WE'LL NEED TO TALK TO OUR FAMILIES FIRST...
EVERYONE WILL BE SO HAPPY FOR US.
HUH? WHERE AM I?
I DON'T REMEMBER THIS STREET.
ZZZ
ZZZ
CHUP
MUST'VE DRUNK TOO..
UHN
WHEN YOU'RE HUNG OVER, WATER TASTES LIKE HONEY!

I LOOK AFTER HIM.
LOOK AFTER?
NOPE, KAIRI, DOWN!


YUP, YUP! THE PLACE WHERE I'M LIVING HAS SOMEONE JUST LIKE THAT!
HUH?
SLAP
I GET IT! IN A UNIQUE PLACE LIKE THIS, THE OWNER MUST BE A GLOOMY, OBSESSIVE SORT WHO'S REALLY TROUBLESOME!

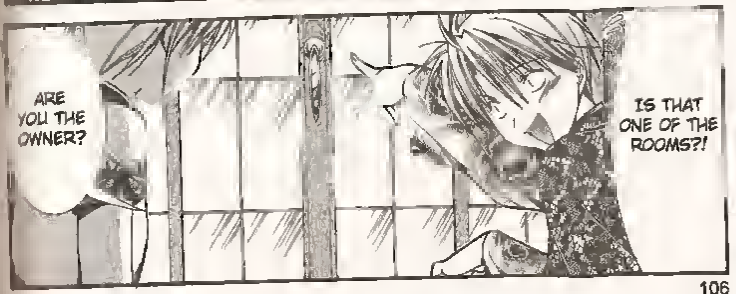

HE ACTS AS IF EVERY DAY IS A CURSE.
You should go out and enjoy the sun.
Mmm... I want some delicious nightmares.
HE SHUTS HIMSELF IN HIS ROOM DURING THE DAY...
IF THE WEATHER IS NICE, HE FEELS ILL.
AND ALL HE TALKS ABOUT IS NIGHTMARES.
It hurts. The sun hurts.

OH, HE DOES SOUND A BIT LIKE KAIRI.
FLAP

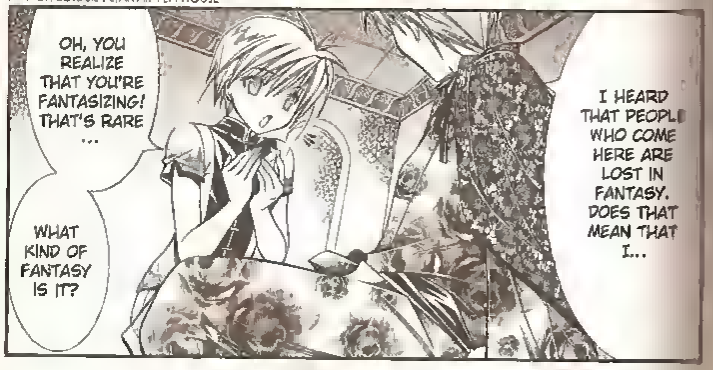

?!
WHERE AM I...?

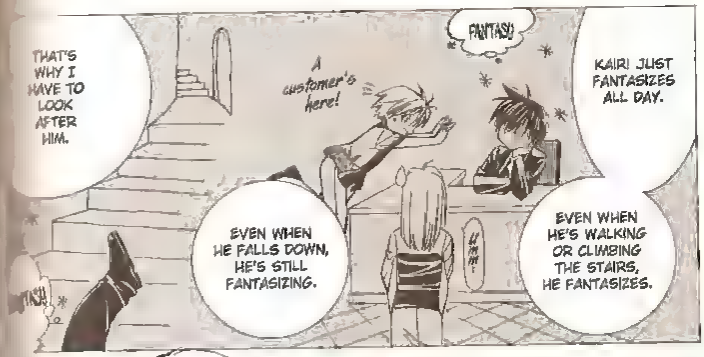
I'M REALLY HERE!
wip
wip
SO THIS IS THE PLACE...!

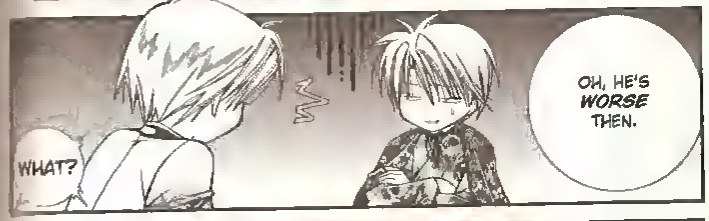
THIS IS THE DELIRIUM. I FOUND YOU PASSED OUT ON THE STREET.
THE DELIRIUM ?!


ARE YOU THE OWNER?
IS THAT ONE OF THE ROOMS?!

MATCH BOX: SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE


OH, YOU REALIZE THAT YOU'RE FANTASIZING! THAT'S RARE ...
WHAT KIND OF FANTASY IS IT?
I HEARD THAT PEOPLE WHO COME HERE ARE LOST IN FANTASY. DOES THAT MEAN THAT I...


THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO LOOK AFTER HIM.
A customer's here!
FANTASY
KAIRI JUST FANTASIZES ALL DAY.
EVEN WHEN HE FALLS DOWN, HE'S STILL FANTASIZING.
EVEN WHEN HE'S WALKING OR CLIMBING THE STAIRS, HE FANTASIZES.

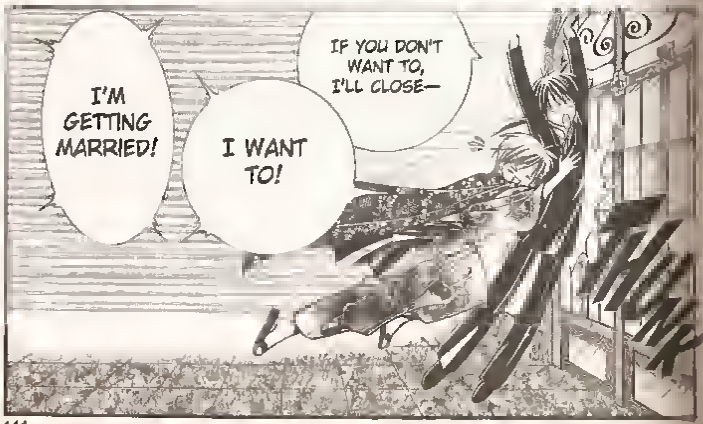


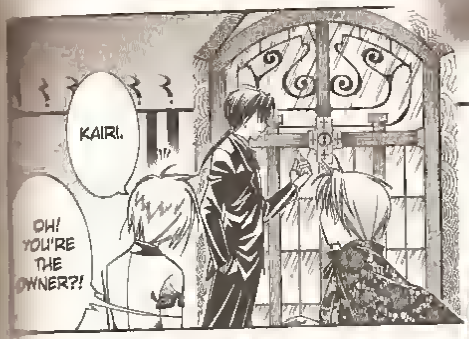
THEIR SOULS WILL ROT IF THEY DON'T GET OUT MORE!
Ha ha ha! You're right!
JUST KIDDING! BUT LOOK AT US! BOTH STUCK LIVING WITH USELESS PEOPLE.

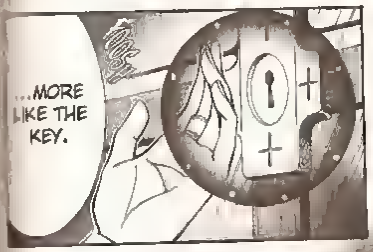
A FANTASY ISN'T REAL. I'D JUST BE INDULGING MYSELF. I'D RATHER...
Hifumi?

UM... AH...

Dare I waste this chance ?!
ROLL
ROLL
But I want it so bad! I want to marry Mizuki right now!


I'M GETTING MARRIED!
I WANT TO!
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO, I'LL CLOSE—
THUNK

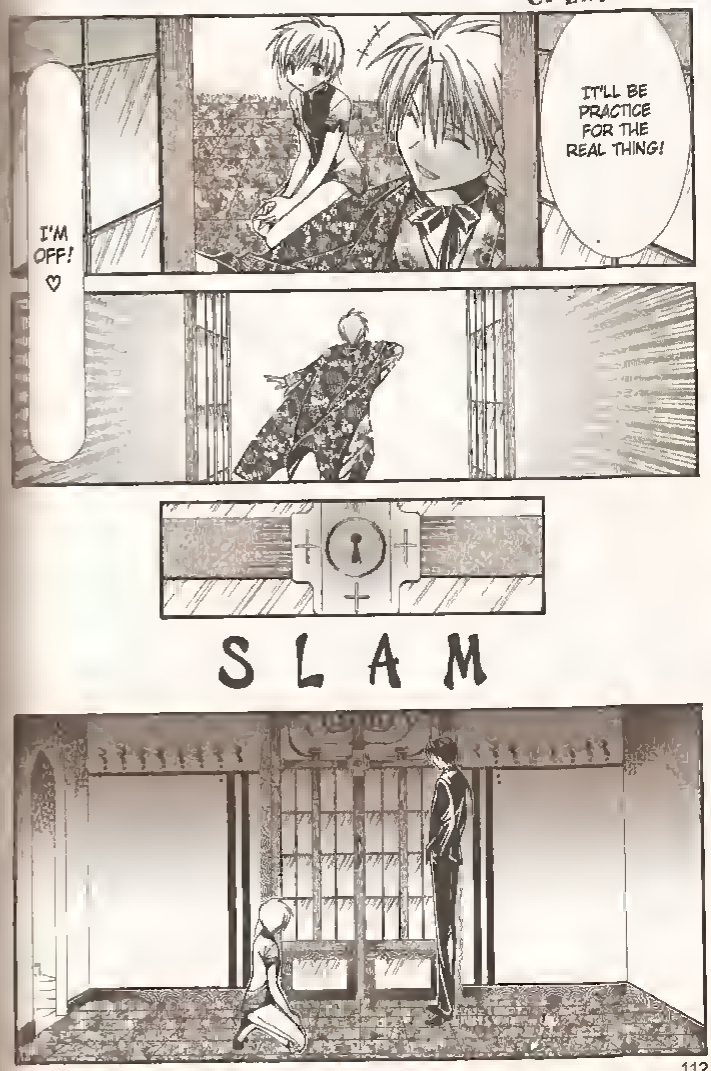

KAIRI.
OH! YOU'RE THE OWNER?!


...MORE LIKE THE KEY.

CLICK

THE DOOR IS NOW OPEN.
THE DECISION IS YOURS.

WE DON'T HAVE REHEARSALS HERE
HIFUMI SAID HE LIVED AT THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE. I WONDER IF THIS IS...
OH, IS THIS...?
WHAT IS IT, SHIMA?
SO WE HAVE ONE OF HIS FRIENDS IN OUR ROOMS.
AH... HIRUKO'S...
OH... SHOULD WE NOT HAVE DONE THAT?


CREAK...
I'M OFF! ♡
IT'LL BE PRACTICE FOR THE REAL THING!
SLAM

DASH
YOU MUST BE MIZUKI'S BROTHER!
※DISCLAIMER. THIS IS HIFUMI'S FANTASY
HM? YES, WE'RE GOING TO BE BROTHERS!
NICE TO MEET YOU. I'M HIFUMI. I'M MARRYING MIZUKI.
NO? OH, WHAT I MEANT...
WHAT? YES, WE'RE VERY HAPPY.
YOU'RE JUST AS HANDSOME AS I THOUGHT YOU'D BE
HIFUMI! ♡
ONE HOUR LATER
HE WAS HARD TO UNDERSTAND NOT SURPRISING FROM A FORMER BAKU.

HA HA HA! MY BEAUTIFUL BRIDE! ♡♡

I AM YOUR CAGED BIRD.
WITH AN EXQUISITE VOICE I'LL SING...
...A BEAUTIFUL SONG OF LOVE...
...WHEN OUR LIPS MEET...

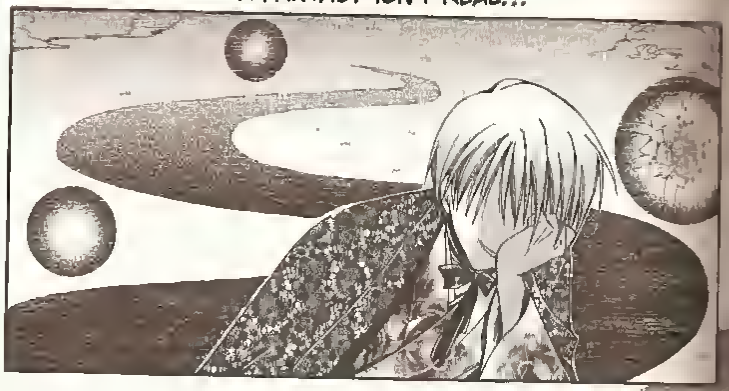
COME QUICKLY ...
LET'S GET MARRIED.
MY ANGEL!

PEOPLE IN HERE ARE SHOULDERING IMPOSSIBLE DESTINIES...
YOU CAN'T JUST STEP IN AND OUT OF THESE ROOMS.
NOT EVERYTHING HAS A HAPPY ENDING HERE.
I JUST THOUGHT OF MARRYING MIZUKI.
DIDN'T YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT?
"LET'S GET MARRIED."
FORGETTING IT WAS A FANTASY AND DOOMED TO REPEAT IT FOREVER..
YOU ONLY KEEP REPEATING THE CEREMONY.
WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE? THERE'S NOTHING AFTER THE MARRIAGE.

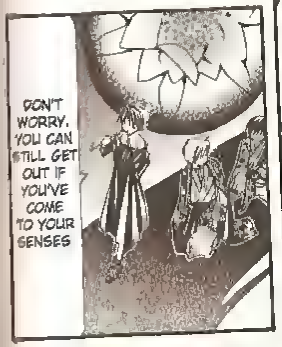
WHA—CK

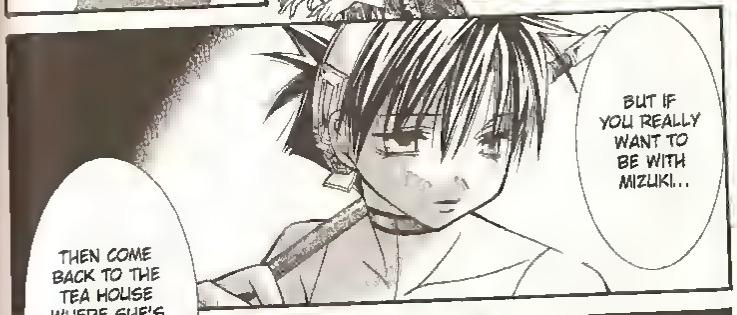
WAKE UP, POOL.
STOMP
DARN IT! MIZUKI AND I WERE JUST ABOUT TO,..
SHIMA CALLED ME HERE... DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'VE DONE?
?!
H-HIRUKO?! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

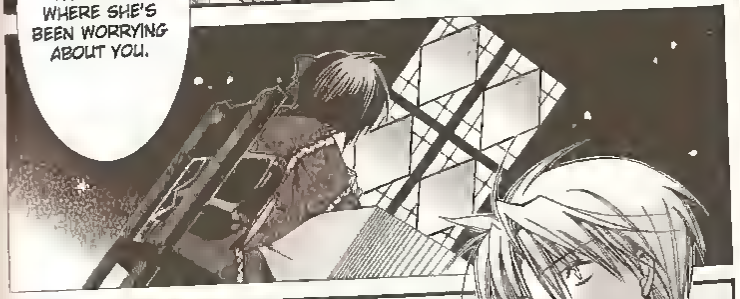
"A FANTASY ISN'T REAL..."

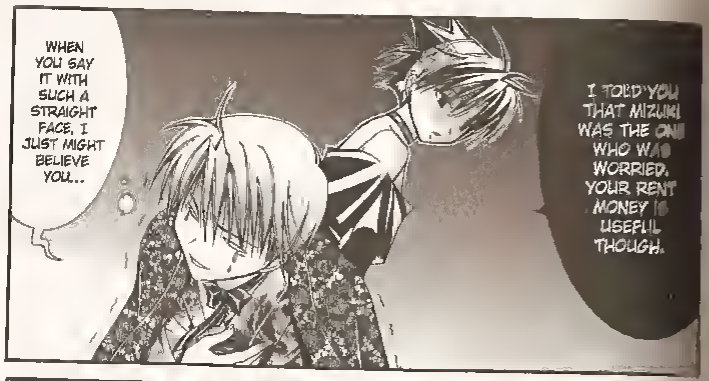


SO TRUE ...



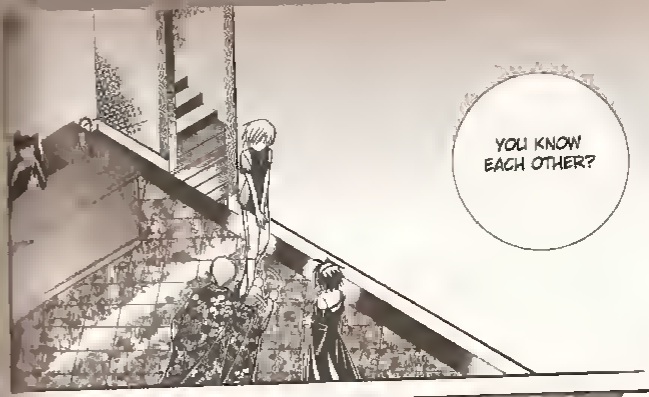





WHEN YOU SAY IT WITH SUCH A STRAIGHT FACE, I JUST MIGHT BELIEVE YOU...
I TOLD YOU THAT MIZUKI WAS THE ONE WHO WAS WORRIED. YOUR RENT MONEY IS USEFUL THOUGH.

LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE HAVING A NICE LIFE.
EEK!
ONCE WE'VE SAVED ENOUGH MONEY WE WON'T NEED YOU.
THAT'S FINE IF I'M KEEPING THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE OPEN...

I HOPE IT'LL STAY THAT WAY.
I'M GLAD.

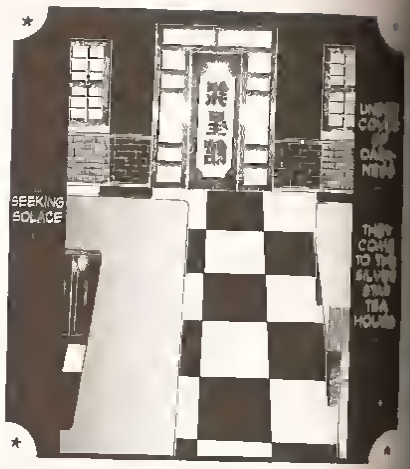

YOU KNOW EACH OTHER?

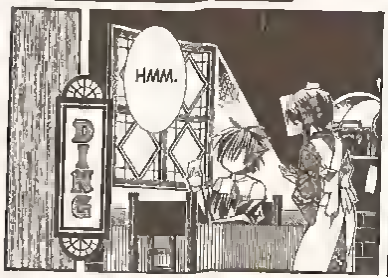
SO I TOLD HIM THAT YOU WERE HERE.
I should have known!
SO HE CAN COME AND GO?
YES, HIRUKO COMES HERE SOME-TIMES.

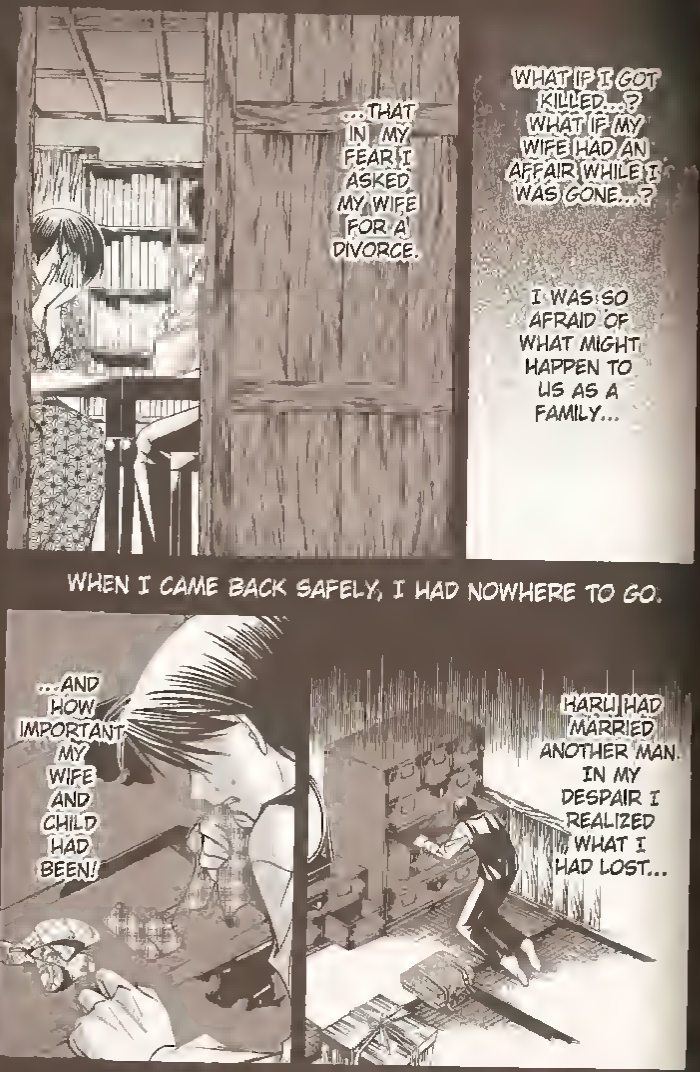
HA HA HA HA. YOU DO HAVE A GOOD SIDE.
ACK!
CROAK

...AND YOU CAME? YOU WERE WORRIED ABOUT ME?

THE THIRTY-SECOND NIGHT: EXPAND






...THAT IN MY FEAR I ASKED MY WIFE FOR A DIVORCE.
WHAT IF I GOT KILLED...? WHAT IF MY WIFE HAD AN AFFAIR WHILE I WAS GONE...?
I WAS SO AFRAID OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO US AS A FAMILY...
WHEN I CAME BACK SAFELY, I HAD NOWHERE TO GO.
...AND HOW IMPORTANT MY WIFE AND CHILD HAD BEEN!
HARU HAD MARRIED ANOTHER MAN. IN MY DESPAIR I REALIZED WHAT I HAD LOST...

...
HOW MANY DAYS DO I HAVE TO KEEP COMING HERE?
THEN LET ME TELL YOU MY STORY AGAIN.
THUNK
MAYBE YOU DON'T GET HOW MUCH DISTRESS I'M IN...
ARE YOU EVEN TRYING TO HELP?!
FOUR YEARS AGO, I WAS A NEWSPAPER REPORTER. I HAD A LOVING WIFE, HARU, AND A DAUGHTER, SHIGERU.
THEN I HAD TO LEAVE FOR SIBERIA ON A WAR ASSIGNMENT. I FEARED THE WORST.
WE HAD BEEN LIVING A HAPPY LIFE...

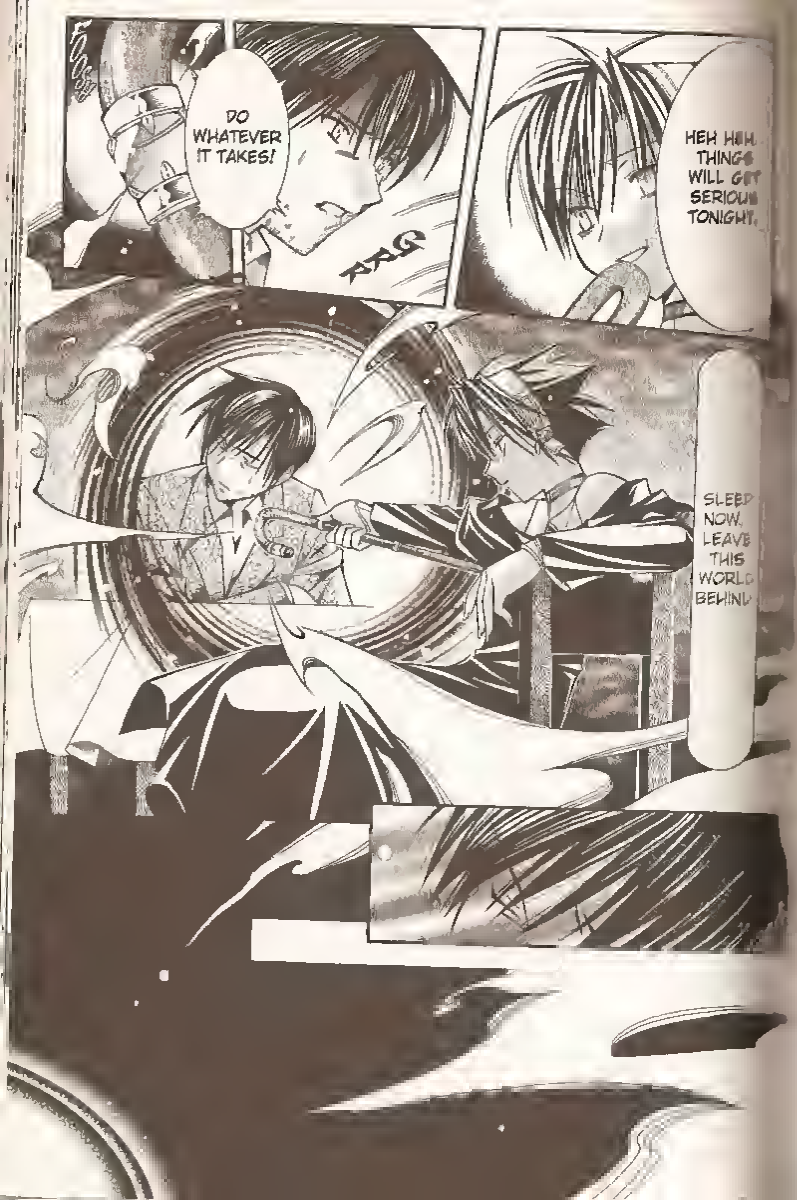
THIS ONE?
NOT THAT!
IT'S TIME TO LEAVE. WHERE'S MY FAVORITE RIBBON?!
SHE SO COULDN'T TAKE MY DREAMS FROM REALITY
SHUFFLE
IS IT THIS ONE?
MY FAVORITE RIBBON...
UHHH
WHERE IS IT?!
WHENEVER I WOKE, I WAS SO CONFUSED.
NOT THAT...
WAIT FOR ME, SHIGERU. DADDY'S COMING TOO...

I RELIVED THE PAST OVER AND OVER IN MY DREAMS.

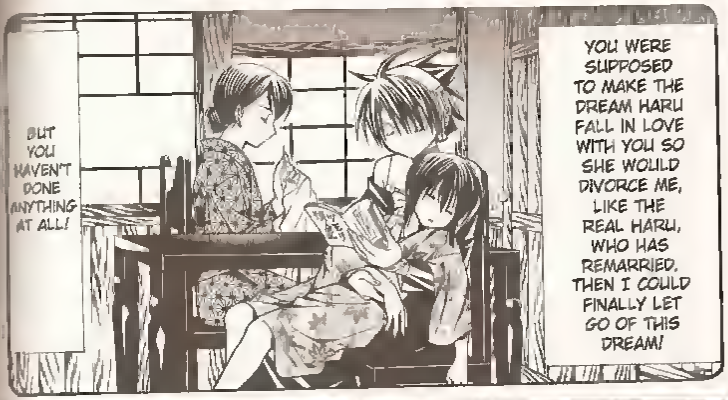
THE BIRTH OF OUR DAUGHTER.
OUR MARRIAGE.
THE FIRST TIME I MET HARU.
EVENTUALLY, THE DREAMS BECAME NIGHTMARES.
MY PAST HAPPINESS FILLED MY DAYS...

I WANTED MORE AND MORE...

I STARTED SLEEPING ALL THE TIME...

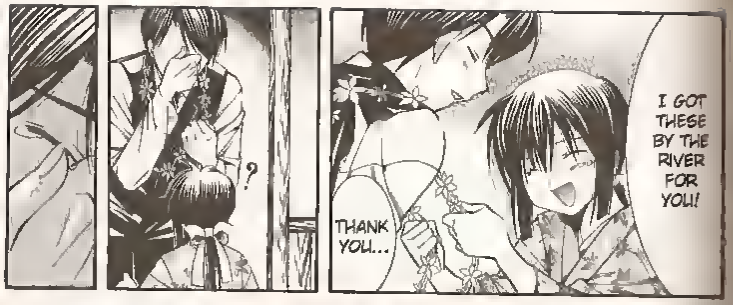

DO WHATEVER IT TAKES!
HEH HEH. THINGS WILL GET SERIOUS TONIGHT.
SLEEP NOW. LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

THE PAST, MY DREAMS, REALITY... EVERYTHING WAS OVERLAPPING... I CAN'T STAND IT!
SO I'VE BEEN COMING HERE EVERY NIGHT FOR HELP.

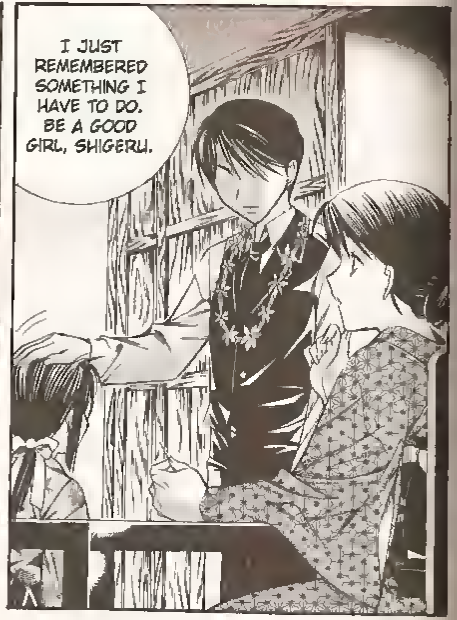

YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO MAKE THE DREAM HARU FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU SO SHE WOULD DIVORCE ME, LIKE THE REAL HARU, WHO HAS REMARRIED. THEN I COULD FINALLY LET GO OF THIS DREAM!
BUT YOU HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING AT ALL!

YOUR INTENSE FEELINGS ARE MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR HER.
BUT SHIGERU IS BECOMING ATTACHED TO ME

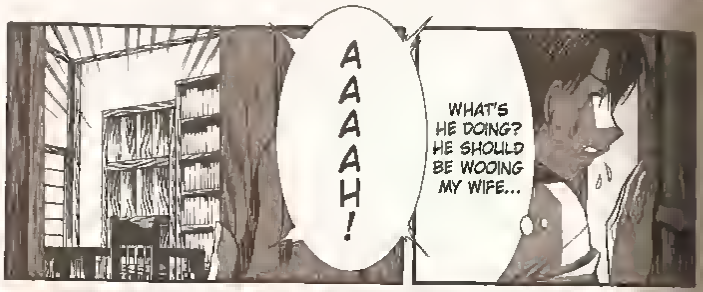
YOU'RE PATHETIC. YOU CAN'T EVEN MAKE ONE WOMAN FALL FOR YOU! I SUPPOSE THAT HARU IS TOO LOYAL TO ME ..



THIS IS A DREAM.
IT'S NOT REAL.
I CAN'T HOLD ON TO THIS FOREVER!

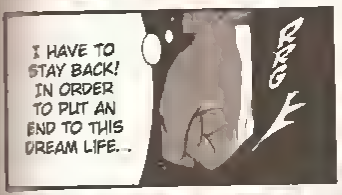


OH, HIRUKO! YOU CAME AGAIN! YAY!

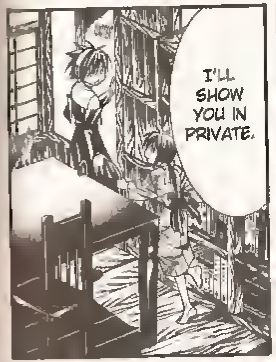

AAAAH!
WHAT'S HE DOING? HE SHOULD BE WOOING MY WIFE...

CLATTER
WHAT HAPPENED?!
SHIGERU?!
DASH!

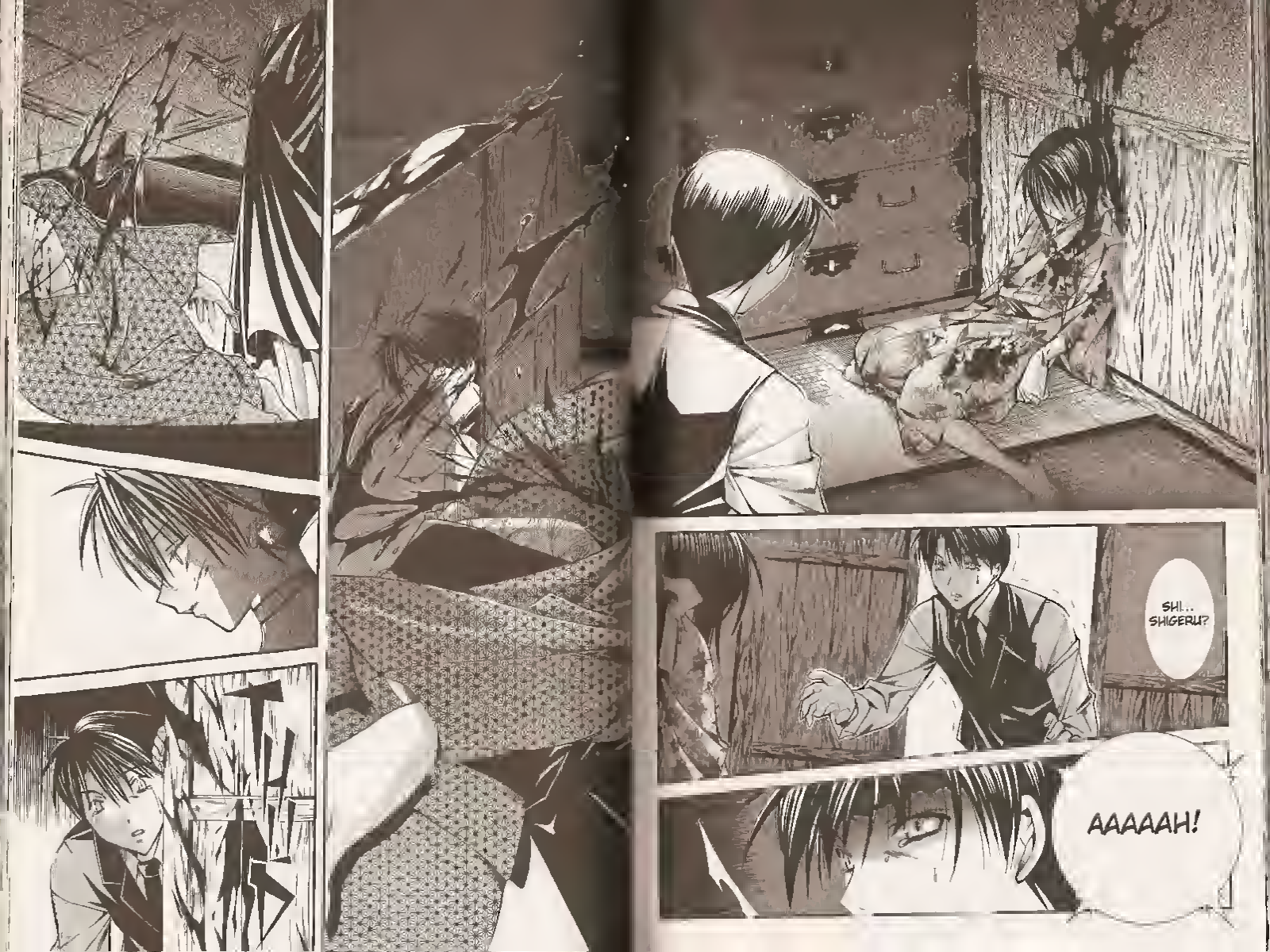
LOOKS LIKE HE'S FINALLY GOING TO DO SOMETHING...

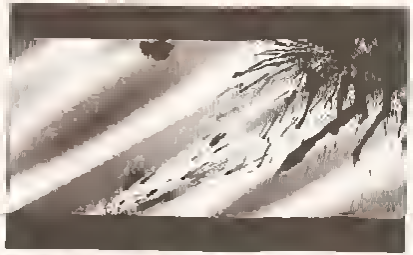

I HAVE TO STAY BACK! IN ORDER TO PUT AN END TO THIS DREAM LIFE..
REC

BUT MY WIFE IS SO LOYAL...

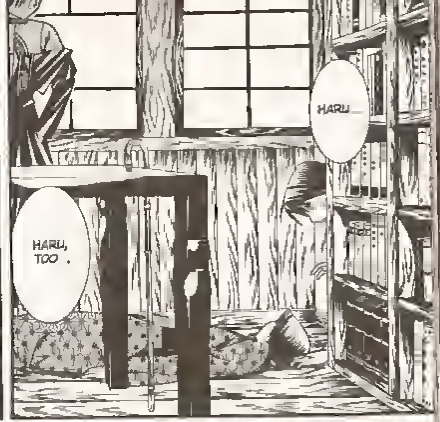

I'LL SHOW YOU IN PRIVATE.

I BROUGHT YOU SOMETHING.
Guess what's in my pocket!
WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT?


SHI..
SHIGERU?
AAAAAH!

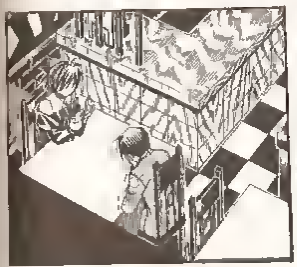


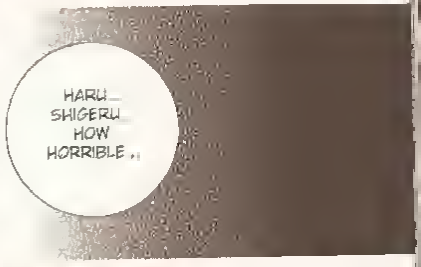
TIME TO WAKE UP.



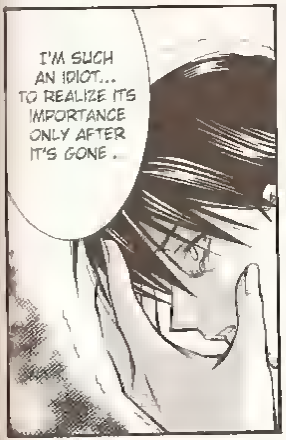
NOW ALL WE NEED IS *YOUR* DEATH...

BUT I DON'T EVEN HAVE THAT NOW.
THERE'S NOTHING TO KEEP ME GOING.
I SHOULD JUST END THIS REAL LIFE TOO...
...RIGHT?
STAGGER...
EVEN IF IT WAS A DREAM, IT WAS BETTER THAN BEING LEFT IN THIS HARSH REALITY...
I SHOULD HAVE JUST KEPT DREAMING UNTIL I DIED



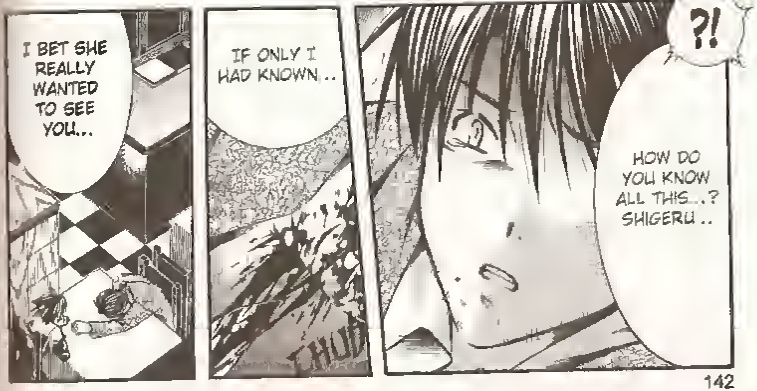

HARU... SHIGERU... HOW HORRIBLE..

IF WE HADN'T, YOUR DREAM WOULD HAVE KEPT EXPANDING.
THE BEST WAY TO RELEASE YOU FROM THE OVERLAPPING OF YOUR DREAM AND REALITY WAS TO END ONE OF THEM.


I'M SUCH AN IDIOT... TO REALIZE ITS IMPORTANCE ONLY AFTER IT'S GONE.

ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU WANTED? YOUR LIFE IS NOW BACK TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE.
. SO ALL THAT'S LEFT IS THIS REALITY? A LIFE WITH NO WIFE, NO CHILD, NO REASON TO LIVE?

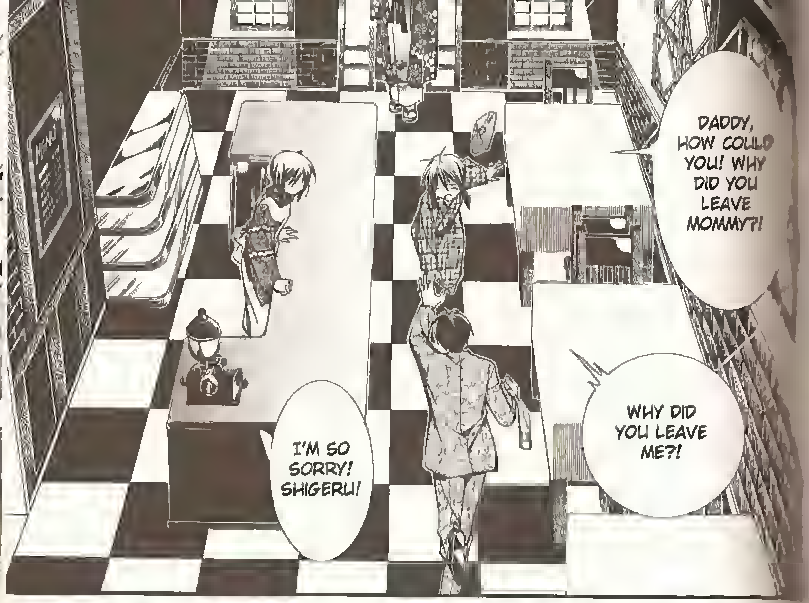
HARU AND HER SECOND HUSBAND WERE KILLED IN THE GREAT KANTO EARTHQUAKE.
OH, BY THE WAY... APPARENTLY, SHIGERU IS LIVING WITH RELATIVES.



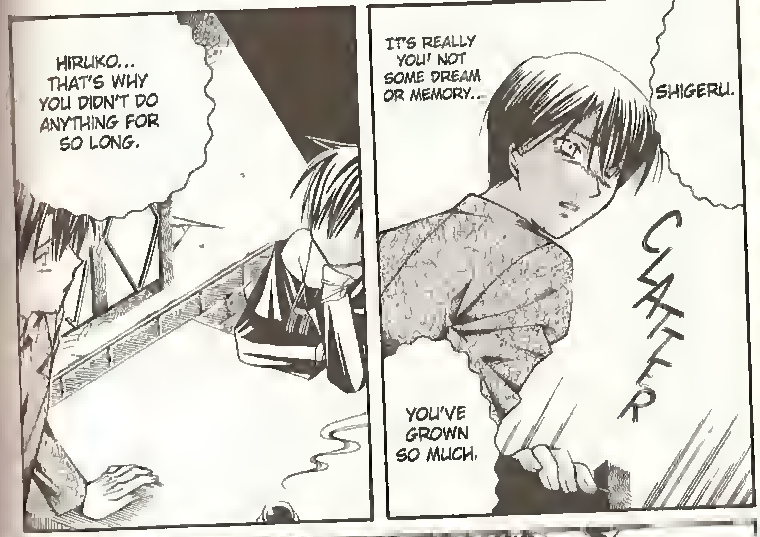
TIME TO WAKE UP.

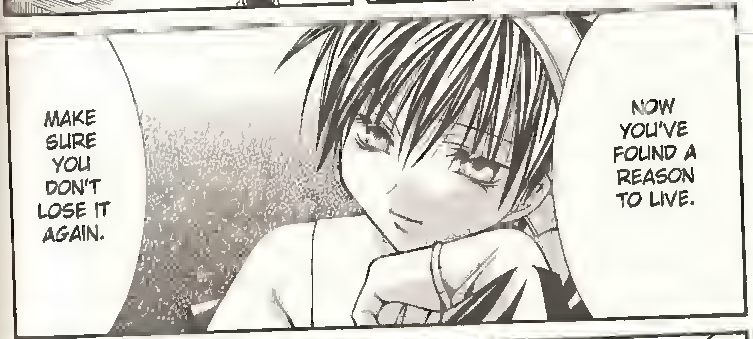
AND NOW YOU'VE COME BACK TO REALITY.
BUT BOTH DREAMS ENDED WHEN YOU DIED.
Y'KNOW, EVEN WITH THE HELP OF MY FATHER'S MONEY IT STILL TOOK SEVERAL DAYS TO FIND HER. SHE WAS BEING SHUTTLED AROUND BETWEEN RELATIVES.
RING
TH-THEN...
SHIGERU ?!
LIKE I SAID IN MY NOTE, I FOUND HER THOUGH.

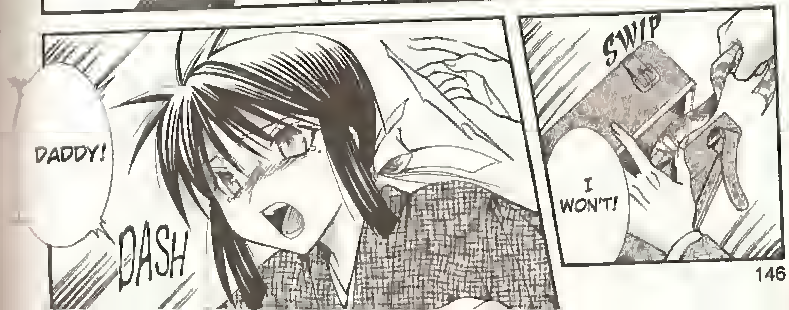
GOOD MORNING, SHIGEO.
YOU DID DIE... TWICE! BUT IN THE DREAM.
WHAT?! DIDN'T I DIE?!
?
THAT MADE YOUR DREAM EXPAND AND OVERLAP INTO REALITY
YOU WERE SO DESPERATE THAT YOU CAME TO THE SILVER STAR IN REALITY AND IN YOUR DREAM.
WHEN YOU FIRST WOKE UP, YOU WERE STILL DREAMING.
DEATH OF THE FAMILY
DEATH IN THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE
YOU HAD A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM.


DADDY, HOW COULD YOU! WHY DID YOU LEAVE MOMMY?!
WHY DID YOU LEAVE ME?!
I'M SO SORRY! SHIGERU!

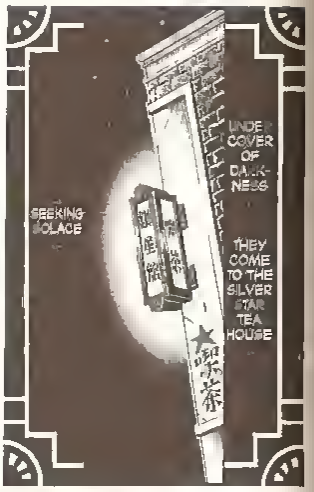
SQUEEZE
I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOU AGAIN!

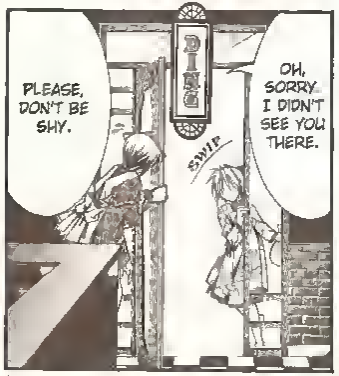

HIRUKO... THAT'S WHY YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING FOR SO LONG.
IT'S REALLY YOU! NOT SOME DREAM OR MEMORY...
SHIGERU.
CLATTER
YOU'VE GROWN SO MUCH.

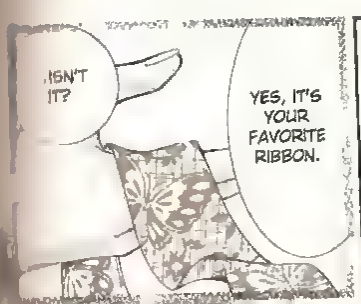

MAKE SURE YOU DON'T LOSE IT AGAIN.
NOW YOU'VE FOUND A REASON TO LIVE.


DADDY!
DASH
SWIP
I WON'T!

The Thirty-Third Night: Stories



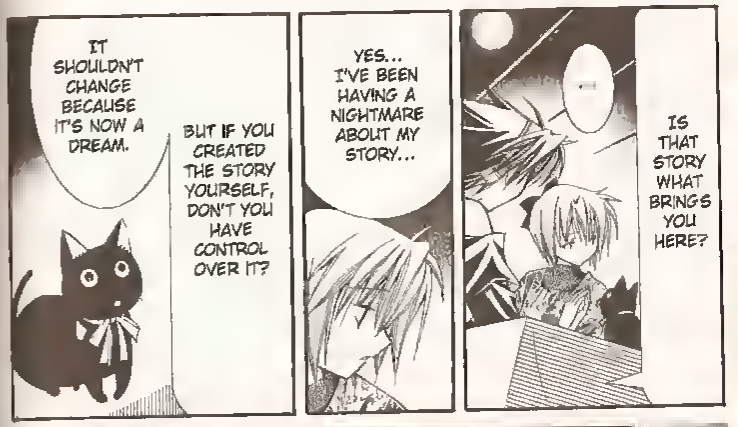




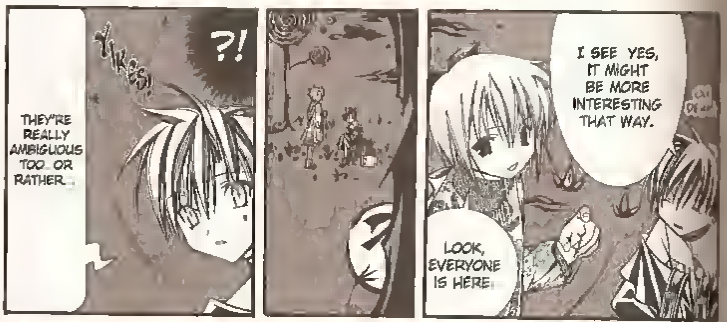
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
GOOD EVENING ARE YOU HERE ABOUT A NIGHTMARE?
HOW CUTE! ♡
YES, AS SOON AS I MEET SOMEONE I CAN MAKE UP A STORY ABOUT THEM.
SO YOU'RE GOOD AT MAKING UP STORIES.
SAWA HITOMI! I'M REALLY GOOD AT MAKING UP STORIES HEE HEE I'M GOING TO BE A WRITER WHEN I GET OLDER
RIGHT NOW I'M BUSY MAKING UP A STORY ABOUT MY FRIENDS TAKU, CHIYO AND YAE. WE'RE ALWAYS TOGETHER. I SPEND ALL DAY THINKING OF MY STORY SO MUCH, THAT I FORGET REALITY.
NO, THAT'S OKAY.
WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO MAKE ONE ABOUT YOU?
OH! REALLY?

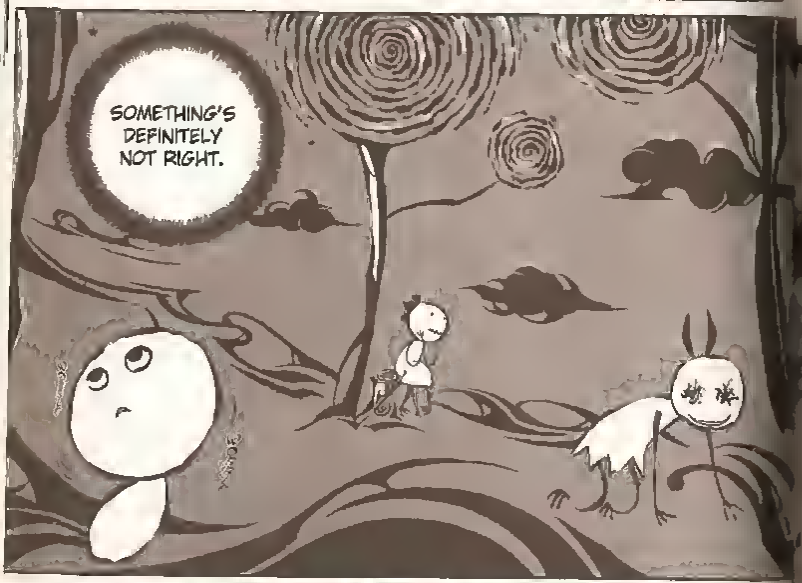
HMPH!
WHAT IS IT?
THUD THUD THUD
GREAT... LOOKS LIKE WE HAVE A STRANGE ONE.
UP

SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

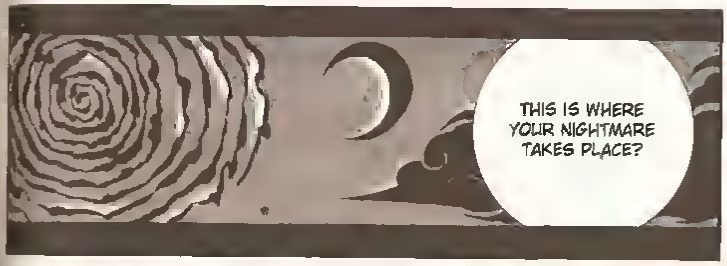

IT SHOULDN'T CHANGE BECAUSE IT'S NOW A DREAM.
BUT IF YOU CREATED THE STORY YOURSELF, DON'T YOU HAVE CONTROL OVER IT?
YES... I'VE BEEN HAVING A NIGHTMARE ABOUT MY STORY...
IS THAT STORY WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?

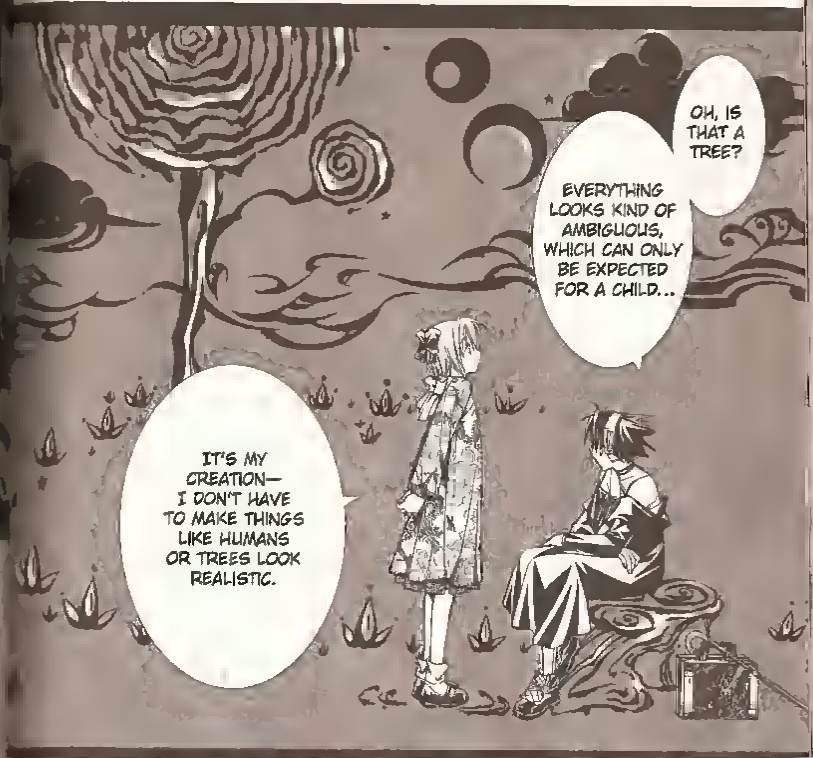
THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE STORY...
I SHOULD PROBABLY SEE FOR MYSELF.
OH WELL. LOOKS LIKE I'M BABYSITTING TONIGHT.
MY STORY WAS SO PERFECT...
YOU WOULD THINK... BUT IT'S BECOME A NIGHTMARE.
I'M SO SAD...


THEY'RE REALLY AMBIGUOUS TOO...OR RATHER...
YIKES!
?!
I SEE. YES, IT MIGHT BE MORE INTERESTING THAT WAY.
LOOK, EVERYONE IS HERE.


SOMETHING'S DEFINITELY NOT RIGHT.

GOOD EVENING, TAKU!
HE HAS NO ARMS OR LEGS...
THAT'S TAKU.
SAWA, THE KID ON THE LEFT...

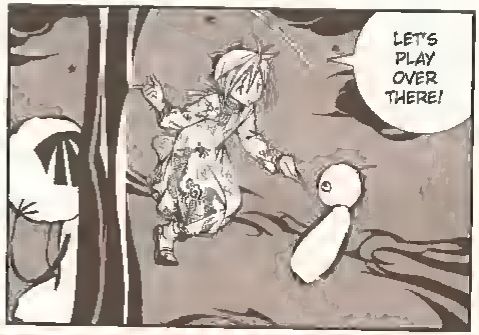

THIS IS WHERE YOUR NIGHTMARE TAKES PLACE?


OH, IS THAT A TREE?
EVERYTHING LOOKS KIND OF AMBIGUOUS, WHICH CAN ONLY BE EXPECTED FOR A CHILD...
IT'S MY CREATION— I DON'T HAVE TO MAKE THINGS LIKE HUMANS OR TREES LOOK REALISTIC.

HE'S AVOIDING ME.
WHENEVER I COME, HE ALWAYS GOES HOME...

SAWA, THAT KID'S ATTITUDE.
SEE? HE DOESN'T NEED HANDS BECAUSE HE DOESN'T WANT TO HOLD MINE.

SWIP


LET'S PLAY OVER THERE!

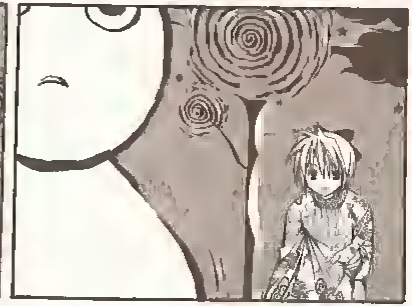
I HAVE NO HANDS TO HOLD YOURS.
I'M GOING HOME

CHIYO.

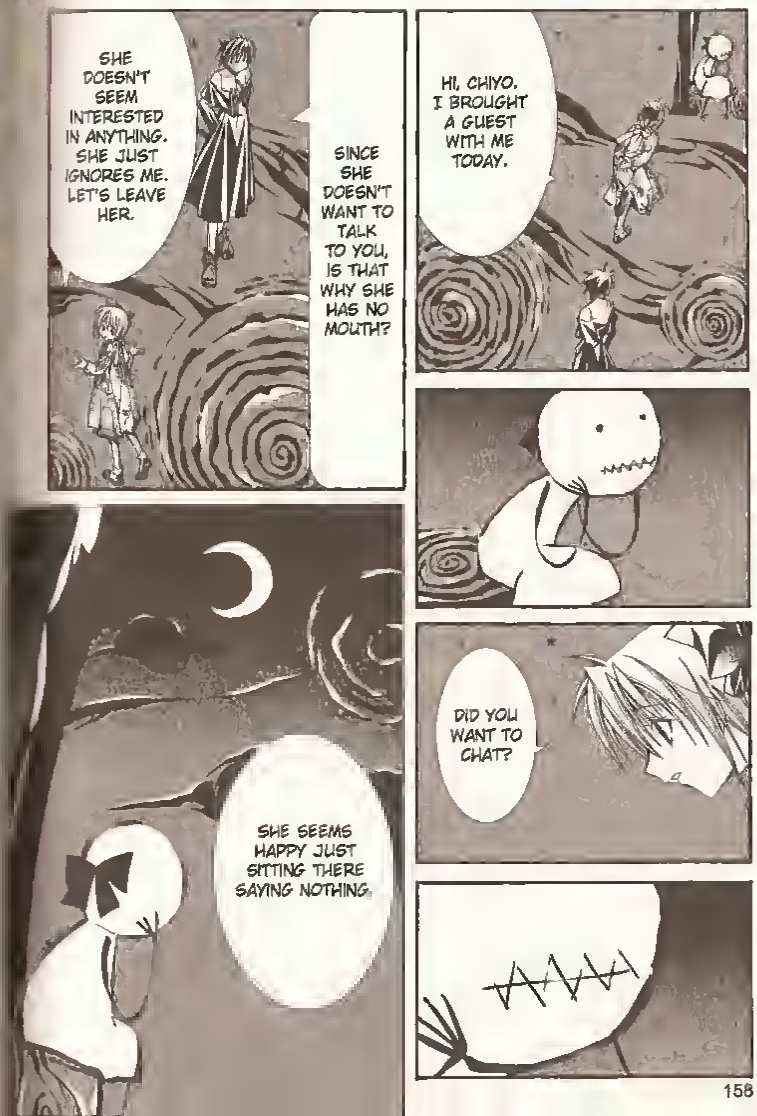
EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE FRIENDS
WHAT ABOUT HER? HER MOUTH IS SEWN SHUT...

CMP

SAY



YAE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
THE LAST CHILD MUST BE YAE.
EWWW! A WORM!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! I TOLD YOU I HATE WORMS! STOP DIGGING THEM UP!
I'D PREFER IT IF YOU DIDN'T.
THEN DON'T COME HERE ANYMORE.


SHE DOESN'T SEEM INTERESTED IN ANYTHING. SHE JUST IGNORES ME. LET'S LEAVE HER.
SINCE SHE DOESN'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU, IS THAT WHY SHE HAS NO MOUTH?
SHE SEEMS HAPPY JUST SITTING THERE SAYING NOTHING.
HI, CHIYO. I BROUGHT A GUEST WITH ME TODAY.
DID YOU WANT TO CHAT?
AWW

YAE! STOP IT! YOU'RE ALWAYS HITTING PEOPLE...
SPLAT
DON'T COME NEAR ME!
SAWA, IS THIS THE STORY YOU CREATED?
...
GO AWAY!
GO AWAY!
GO AWAY!

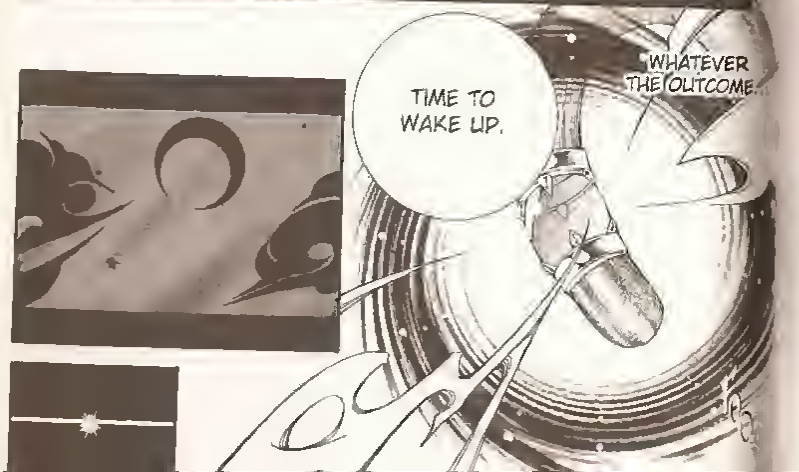
YOU'RE SUCH A PAIN! GO AWAY!
BUT...
UH...
UH...
THAT'S WHY HER EYES...
YAE WON'T EVEN LOOK AT ME...
I'M SO LONELY!
PLAY WITH ME!
WAAH! WAAH!

YOU SAID THEY WERE YOUR FRIENDS, SO WHY DON'T YOU GUYS PLAY TOGETHER NICELY?
IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE YOU'RE FRIENDS TO ME
YOU'VE CREATED THEM SO THAT ONE HAS NO LIMBS AND ANOTHER CAN'T SPEAK. AND THEIR ATTITUDE PROBLEM...
BECAUSE THIS IS HOW THEY ARE IN REAL LIFE!
IT TURNED INTO THIS MISERABLE STORY BEFORE I COULD STOP IT...
IF I COULD CHANGE THE STORY, I WOULD! BUT I CAN'T!

I THOUGHT SO.
TAKU WON'T HOLD MY HAND. CHIYO WON'T TALK TO ME.
YAE WON'T EVEN LOOK AT ME.
SO YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO THOUGHT YOU WERE FRIENDS...
HUH?
THEN YOU HAVE TO WORK HARDER TO UNDERSTAND THEM.
I WANT US TO BE FRIENDS IN REAL LIFE!
BUT I WANT US TO BE FRIENDS!
AND BY TURNING THIS STORY INTO A DREAM, YOU CREATED A NIGHTMARE...

I SHOULD BE ABLE TO CREATE A WONDERFUL STORY!

OH DEAR... FORMING RELATIONSHIPS ISN'T THAT SIMPLE, BUT IT'S A MOVE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

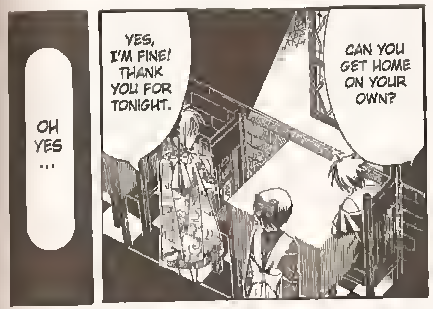

TIME TO WAKE UP.
WHATEVER THE OUTCOME...

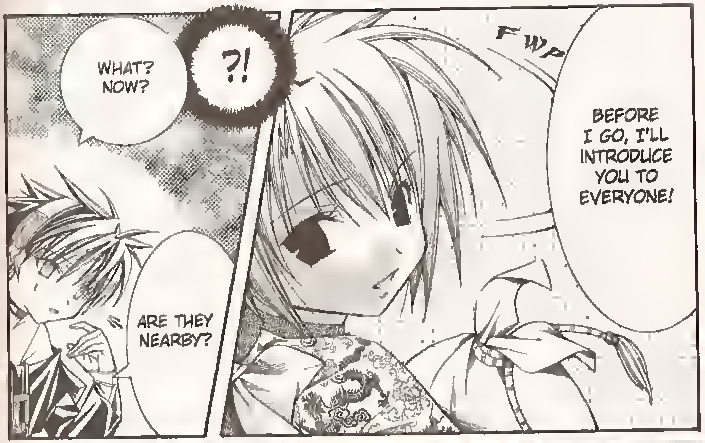
DON'T SHY AWAY FROM THEIR ATTITUDE IN REAL LIFE. NEXT TIME, TRY YOUR BEST TO MAKE UP A HAPPY STORY TO TELL THEM.
BUT... HOW?
YOU WERE FRIGHTENED BY THEIR BEHAVIOR AND HAVEN'T SHOWN YOUR TRUE SELF. YOU HAVE TO LET THEM GET TO KNOW YOU. OR ELSE YOU'LL NEVER GET ALONG.

THEN, WILL THEY UNDERSTAND ME?
THEN, WILL THEY BE HAPPY?
TRY MY BEST TO MAKE A HAPPY STORY...

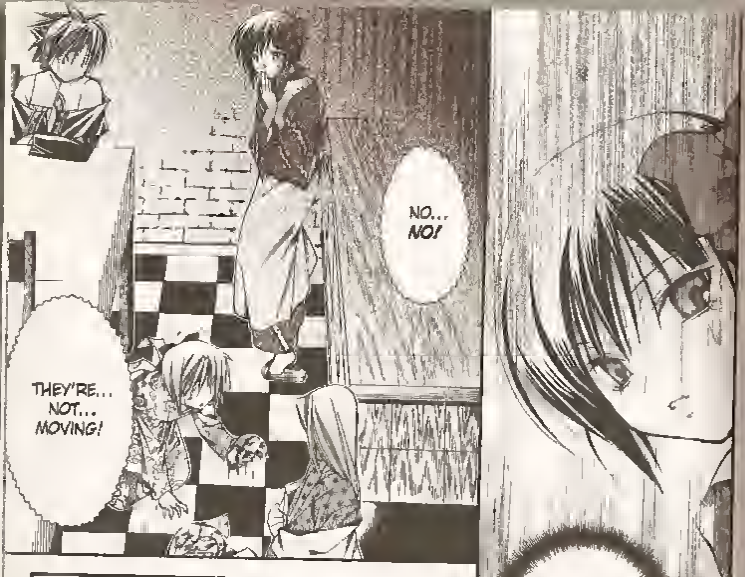
I REALLY WANT TO BECOME FRIENDS WITH THEM.
...OKAY, I'LL TRY.
IF YOU WANT IT YOU HAVE TO TRY.

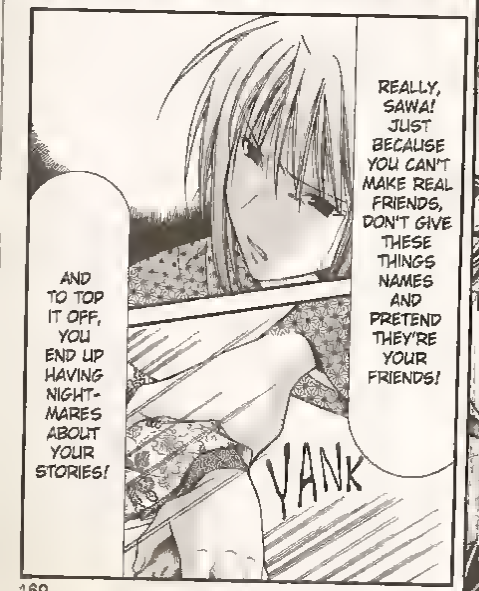
M-MOTHER?!
HOW COULD YOU JUST RUN OUT LIKE THAT! I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU FOR HOURS!
!
I TOLD YOU TO THROW IT AWAY!
WHY DO YOU CARRY THAT DISGUSTING THING AROUND?!
ARE YOU STILL CARRYING THAT?!
WE'RE GOING HOME RIGHT NOW, SAWA!
CRUNCH
CRUSH
CRUSH
THIS IS WHY YOU CAN'T MAKE REAL FRIENDS!

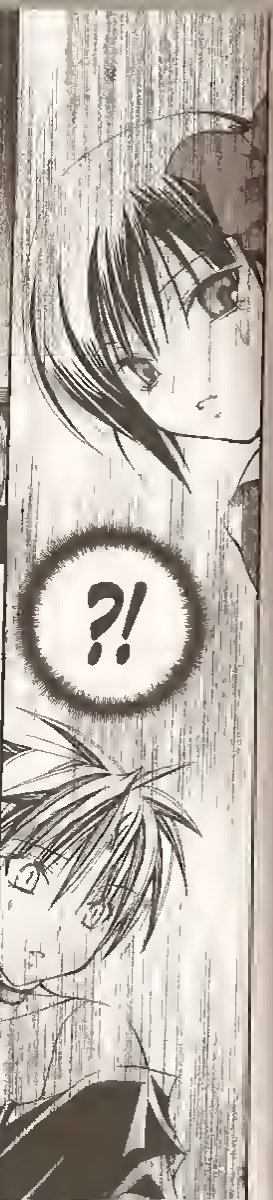

OH YES ...
YES, I'M FINE! THANK YOU FOR TONIGHT.
CAN YOU GET HOME ON YOUR OWN?


WHAT? NOW?
?!
ARE THEY NEARBY?
FWP
BEFORE I GO, I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO EVERYONE!

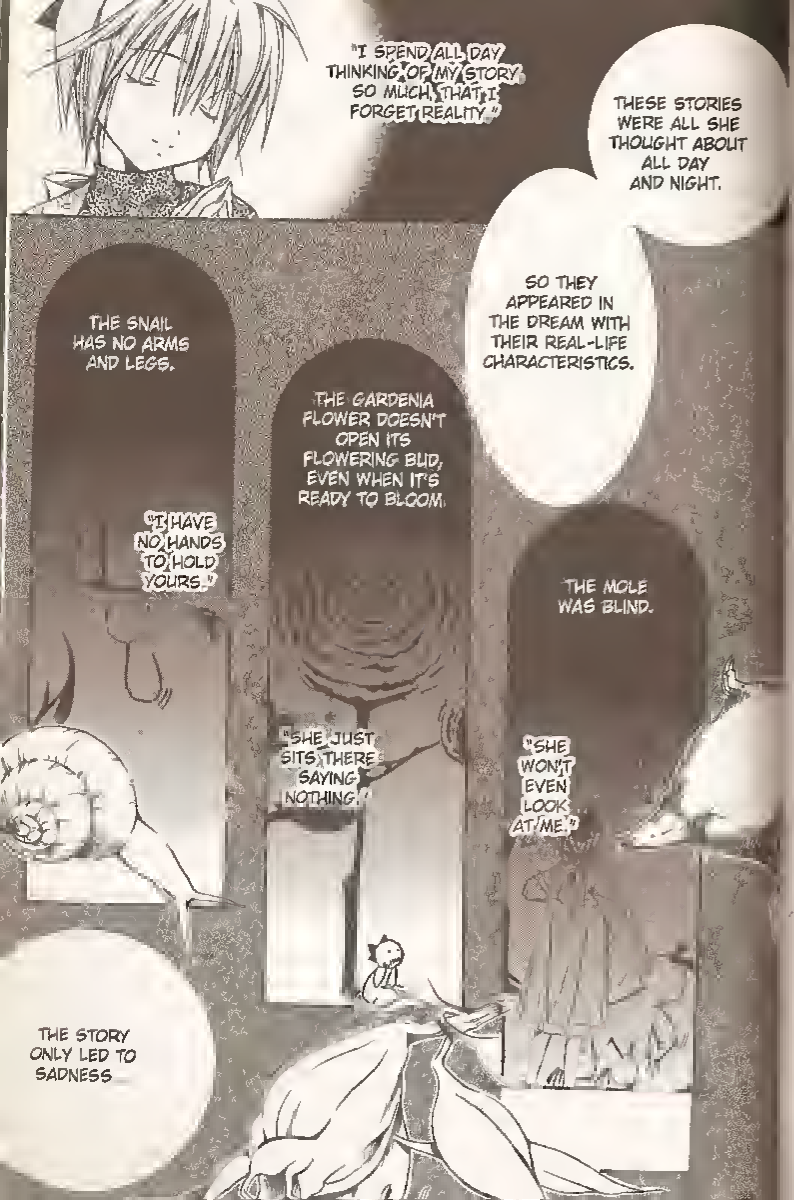
SAWA!
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE HERE!
I TOLD YOU WE WERE ALWAYS TOGETHER.


NO... NO!
THEY'RE... NOT... MOVING!


AND TO TOP IT OFF, YOU END UP HAVING NIGHT-MARES ABOUT YOUR STORIES!
YANK
REALLY, SAWA! JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN'T MAKE REAL FRIENDS, DON'T GIVE THESE THINGS NAMES AND PRETEND THEY'RE YOUR FRIENDS!


?!

NOOOO!
CHIYO!
YAE!
TAKU ...!


"I SPEND ALL DAY THINKING OF MY STORY SO MUCH, THAT I FORGET REALITY."
THESE STORIES WERE ALL SHE THOUGHT ABOUT ALL DAY AND NIGHT.
SO THEY APPEARED IN THE DREAM WITH THEIR REAL-LIFE CHARACTERISTICS.
THE SNAIL HAS NO ARMS AND LEGS.
THE GARDENIA FLOWER DOESN'T OPEN ITS FLOWERING BUD, EVEN WHEN IT'S READY TO BLOOM.
"I HAVE NO HANDS TO HOLD YOURS."
THE MOLE WAS BLIND.
"SHE JUST SITS THERE SAYING NOTHING."
"SHE WON'T EVEN LOOK AT ME."
THE STORY ONLY LED TO SADNESS...

SLAM
HOW RIDICULOUS!
THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH YOU, CHILD!
THAT I WOULD MAKE UP A HAPPY STORY FOR US!
BUT... BUT I'D DECIDED...
THAT I WAS GOING TO TRY HARDER TO BE THEIR FRIEND...
LOOKS LIKE IT.
HIRUKO, ARE THOSE HER FRIENDS?
...
IN HER HEART, SHE PROBABLY WANTED PEOPLE FRIENDS...
IN HER STORY, WITH ITS AMBIGUOUS IMAGERY, SHE MADE THEM INTO THE SHAPE OF PEOPLE.
SHE HAD TROUBLE GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE, SO HER ONLY FRIENDS WERE THESE THINGS THAT COULDN'T TALK.

あとがき

AFTERWORD

NOW HER STORY HAS ENDED... AND ALL SHE'S LEFT WITH IS A CRUEL REALITY.
-NOT ONLY WAS SHE MAKING UP STORIES, BUT SHE WAS MAKING UP HER FRIENDS' TOO.
BUT...

感謝！ THANK YOU!

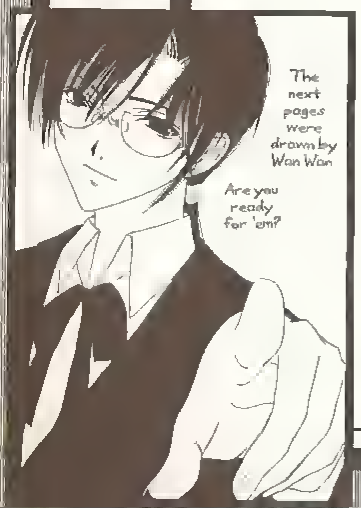
My fabulous assistants:
Katsumi Arai
Mieko Araki
Kozue Okazawa
Yoshimi Shiroko
Kiyoka Shôbayashi
MOAI (info)

I am so indebted to these people. I'm so grateful for their attention to detail in their work. Even though they were busy, they took care of my last-minute requests. Thank you so much!

The people who helped me:

My editor, Yuka Saeki
The Editor-in-Chief
Everyone that was involved in making this book

<Everyone at Square Enix>



My special friends:

Wan Wan Shiroi

If I didn't have Wan Wan, I don't know how I'd get my work done... He's so special.

Neema Riru Shirayuki

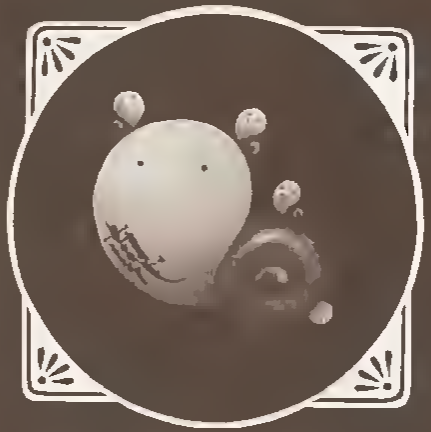
Two wonderful assistants that are too good for the likes of me. I'm so grateful for their excellent work.

後書キ AFTER-WORD

Hello! Shin Mashiba here. First of all, a big thank you to my editor, Saeki. I'm eternally grateful for her warm support even though I'm always causing so much trouble. Also huge thanks to the Editor-in-Chief, the staff at Square Enix and to my wonderful readers.

See you soon!

I'm not here.
I'm here.
Excuse me.
I have a fantasy.
Really?
I am soooo hungry.
I don't have any nightmares.
I was thinking of a fantasy with a super violent, love-hate relationship between Hiruko, Hifumi, and my brother would be good. Or maybe a fantasy set in a school or a historical setting, or had a cosplay theme where you give them cutesy ears or a tail or something... Or you could inject some boys love in it. Or make it really serious and dramatic. That would be fun too.
Ha ha ha! You seem to have a problem!
You'll be fine!
Really?
I'll puke.
Let's just go eat.
Hiruko!
So I've prepared a special nightmare for you.
I thought this might happen...
Thanks.
Don't think we can run it in the magazine. But since you have so much time on your hands... why don't you write a book about it yourself?
Th- They're ignoring me!
At least help it to it in the restroom
Can't
Don't freak out if I puke
Welcome——
BO
OM
B
W
O
O
S
H
WAAH!
Today's fantasy was a bit too much...
BOOF
BOOF
HOW DO YOU DO?
Wan
Wan
Shiroi
Poop-flavored curry or curry-flavored poop... the eternal debate



SHIN MASHIBA

A dream where all your wishes come true. A dream with too happy an ending.
...These are probably the worst nightmares.

Shin Mashiba's first manga, *Yumekui Kenbun* (Nightmare Inspector), premiered in *Monthly Stencil*, a shojo magazine, in December 2001 and was then serialized in *Monthly G Fantasy* from 2003 to 2007. Mashiba-san's own nightmares include being forced to eat 50 living slugs and being chased by time.

COMING NEXT VOLUME

RECOLLECTION

Dreams on the menu in this volume: a woman tied to a burden she can't escape and another being watched from afar, a fantastic ordeal for Hiruko's briefcase, a girl who no longer feels like herself, a rival Baku who makes nightmares worse, the truth of Hiruko's past, Mizuki's childhood memories, and Hifumi's terrible blunder.

AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 2009!

YUMEKUI KENBUN

NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR

YUMEKUI KENBUN: NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR
VOL. 5
The VIZ Media Edition

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is rated T for Teen and is recommended for ages 13 and up. This volume contains fantasy violence.
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